

choice

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Distorted sizing
CHOICE discovers how the fashion industry manipulates clothes sizes.



Wireless security
Make the most of wireless technology while keeping your home network safe.

On test

- + Camera phones
- + 66cm TVs
- + Electric heaters
- + Microwave ovens
- + Speaker docks
- + Pool fences
- + Change tables
- + Handheld GPS

Winning the super game

We answer your superannuation questions

PLUS

How popular takeaways stack up

Pool fencing dangers

Camera phones – our snapshot of the best

Jams v fruit spreads: the truth behind the hype

Why the glycaemic index matters

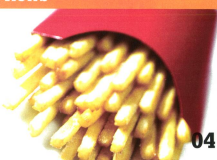


105 PRODUCTS
RATED!

Breakthrough treatments for varicose veins – CHOICE weighs up the risks and the benefits

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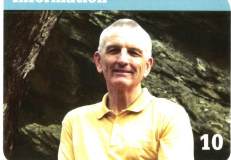
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Subscribers' helpline call 02 9577 3399



Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au

"CHOICE it" before you buy it

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Because we pay full price for the products we test, we can remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry – our only aim is to give consumers the best possible information about buying products and services. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is funded by subscriptions to our magazines and CHOICE Online, and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers.

We have laboratories in Marrickville, Sydney, that test everything from juicers to plasma TVs, coffee grinders to MP3 players and air conditioners. We test hundreds of products every year. There's no hidden agenda to our testing – we simply road-test products so that consumers like you don't get ripped off. CHOICE ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys.

CHOICE also has staff who research a wide range of consumer services – everything from the financial industry to the organic food business, supermarket practices to drug companies and pharmacies. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

CHOICE has also always campaigned about consumer goods and services that affect your life. We lobby government and regulators on behalf of all consumers in Australia. CHOICE was established in 1959 and is a not-for-profit, non-party-political organisation.



CHOICE Best Buy CHOICE calls a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Best Buys.



CHOICE Green Buy CHOICE calls a product a Green Buy if it delivers both good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.



CHOICE Video When you see the CHOICE Video icon, you can find more information about that story at www.choice.com.au.

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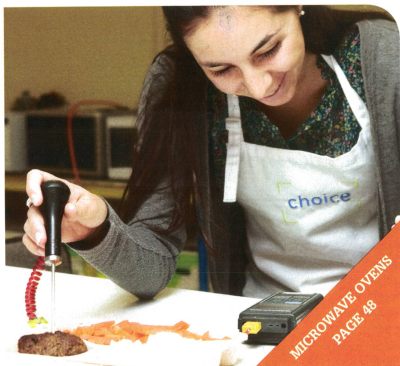
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For subscription and renewal enquiries only, call 1800 069 552

CHOICE Shopper

Call 1300 360 655. Personal subscribers can call us with the model name and number of the product you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number.



On test

- 38 + Camera phones** Some are good enough to substitute for a digital camera.
- 42 + 66cm TVs** These prove that good things don't always come in small packages.
- 45 + Electric heaters** Suitable for heating a bedroom or small living room.
- 51 + Speaker docks** Find out which models can travel for outdoor listening.
- 54 + Pool fences** Our testing exposes serious manufacturing and retailing flaws.
- 58 + Change tables** Don't spend up to \$1100 on tables that fail our safety testing.
- 60 + Handheld GPS** Use our test results to decide if a map and compass will do just as well.



CHOICEextra.com.au This free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers is an index of articles from Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs.

CHOICE Plus Get the magazine plus full online access when you upgrade your membership for just \$11.50 per quarter (usually \$21.95 for online membership). Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and follow the prompts.

Comment

Food labelling laws under threat



Australian consumers have been waiting 16 years for a vital food labelling standard that will help protect them against misleading and unsubstantiated health claims made by food companies. Unfortunately, we have to wait a while longer, as the Food Regulation Ministerial

Council has announced it won't finalise the almost-complete Nutrition, Health and Related Claims standard until it sees the results of a bigger review of food labelling laws.

CHOICE has long argued that health claims on food labels are little more than marketing hype that tell us only part of the story about how healthy a product really is. For instance, we don't think Kellogg's Nutri-Grain should boast of containing "protein for growth and muscle development" when it's high in added sugar and salt and low in fibre.

We've worked with food regulators over the past 16 years to help develop a standard that ensures consumers aren't misled by health hype that's not backed up by good evidence or is used to promote an otherwise unhealthy food. The draft standard hasn't addressed all our concerns, but recent improvements make us more confident that Food Standards Australia New Zealand has balanced food manufacturers' wishes to make claims about the supposed health benefits of their foods with the need to protect the health and interests of consumers.

This long-overdue standard is now under threat, however, as the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) seeks to cut red tape. CoAG believes some food labelling laws might place unnecessary regulatory burdens on food manufacturers and has called on ministers to undertake a comprehensive review of food labelling laws and policy.

CHOICE will continue to fight for a food regulatory system that puts consumers first. Watering down food labelling laws raises questions about the independence of the regulatory system and its commitment to protecting Australian consumers. Tell us of any product you believe is making a dubious claim about its supposed health benefits at www.choice.com.au/healthclaims. ■

Anny Friis
Publisher

+ ADVERTISING

Slap on the wrist for Westpac

The banking giant responds to ASIC's concerns about its potentially deceptive marketing of the Westpac Choice account.

ASIC will also conduct a 'health check' of the term-deposit market.

Westpac has come under the spotlight as the Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) adds resources to its monitoring of advertising of banking products.

ASIC raised concerns with the bank that advertising for its Choice transaction account was misleading or likely to mislead. The account was advertised as free of monthly account-keeping fees for customers depositing at least \$2000 per month. The advertisements also claimed to be getting rid of monthly service fees, in tune with Westpac's "commitment to lowering the cost of banking". ASIC was concerned that when the advertisements were published, Westpac had not committed to retaining the initiative beyond the initial promotional period, except for new account holders who applied during that time.

In response to ASIC's concerns, Westpac has made the removal of monthly fees an ongoing feature of the Choice account for all customers who deposit at least \$2000 per month. The method of avoiding monthly service fees by maintaining a minimum monthly balance of \$3000 has been scrapped. These changes apply to all Westpac Choice accounts from 1 June. Westpac is writing to existing customers to ensure they have not been misled.

This comes as investors and consumers flee to investment products protected under the Federal Government Deposit Guarantee, with total term deposits in Authorised Deposit-taking Institutions growing by 39% from June 2007 to September 2008.

ASIC has also announced it will be conducting a "health check" in the form of a marketing and disclosure review of the term-deposit market. ■

+ PESTICIDES IN FOOD

Free ride for pesticides

McDonald's is taking action to cut the levels of pesticide residues in its fries – but only in the US, not Australia.

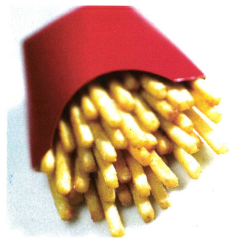
Kicked into action by some major corporate shareholders, the McDonald's Corporation in the US has agreed to carry out a survey of pesticide use by its American potato growers. The fast-food giant has also agreed to promote best practice in pesticide use so as to reduce the levels of pesticide residues in its potatoes. But McDonald's Australia told CHOICE no similar action is being taken here.

The Consumers Union, our sister organisation in the US, lists potatoes among the fruits and vegetables with the highest levels of pesticide residues. And a recent report commissioned by the UK's food regulator, the Food Standards Agency, found pesticide residues in 55 out of 101 samples of potatoes tested, six of them above the maximum residue limit set by law.

In Australia, relatively little is known about pesticide levels in our food supply. Testing for pesticide residues is primarily left to the states and only limited testing is carried out, with imported fruit and vegetables mostly escaping the net. The fresh fruit and vegetable industry has its own internal testing program that operates on a nationwide basis, but the results are not easily available to consumers.

Our national regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, included pesticides in its 20th Australian Total Diet Survey (published in 2003) and reported finding no pesticide residues in potatoes. Under the Food Standards Code, however, 50 different pesticides are specifically permitted for use on potatoes.

CHOICE is concerned Australia's approach to pesticide regulation is lagging far behind the precautionary principle other



countries employ to safeguard public health. Here, a pesticide continues to be permitted unless there's conclusive scientific evidence that it is hazardous to health.

In contrast, the European Union puts the onus on the manufacturer to prove that the pesticide is safe. This has allowed Australian farmers to use pesticides that are no longer permitted in Europe (see *Casualties of the Pesticide War, CHOICE, May 2009*). ■

+ INSURANCE

Protect against genetic discrimination

Know where to complain if you're refused insurance for the wrong reasons.

Most people who felt discriminated against by a life insurance company because of a genetic test result didn't know where to take their complaint. That's one of the findings of a recently published verification study. The collaborative study, part of the Genetic Discrimination Project funded by the Australian Research Council, examined alleged cases of unlawful genetic discrimination in Australia.

People can now take tests to find out if they have a gene that predisposes them to an illness such as cancer or Huntington's disease. The results may indicate they have a "faulty" gene, which can affect their application for life insurance. The Investment and Financial Services Association's (IFSA) policy is that although life insurance applicants are not required to undergo predictive genetic testing, they must reveal the results of any genetic testing of which they or their family members are aware. While this disclosure may result in insurance being refused or restricted, life insurance companies cannot unlawfully discriminate against an individual. In a small number of cases, it was found that such discrimination had occurred, possibly because the insurer misinterpreted the genetic test results and refused cover.

Fourteen cases of alleged unlawful genetic discrimination in Australia between 1998 and 2005 were examined in the study. Eleven were verified by the study as actual cases of genetic discrimination. According to Professor Kristine Barlow-Stewart, the report's principal author, the study shows some people who've been discriminated against have had such decisions overturned after the intervention of genetic experts. This highlights the need for consumers to proactively involve their genetic counsellors and clinicians and help with their insurance applications and other instances when genetic information is disclosed.

It's likely that many victims of discrimination never make a complaint. Consumers who feel they've been unfairly discriminated against can first raise the complaint with their insurance company through its official dispute resolution channel. If the outcome is unsatisfactory, the next step is to contact the Financial Ombudsman Service (www.fos.org.au) or IFSA (www.ifsas.com.au). ■

+ TEA ANTIOXIDANTS

Shelf time proves risky

Green tea has long been prized for its antioxidants, but new research suggests even short-term storage drastically reduces its health benefits.

Just six months in the pantry could be enough to destroy nearly 90% of antioxidants in some tea, according to a recent US study. The finding follows growing evidence that antioxidants – particularly a class of compounds called catechins – in tea have health benefits.

The study, *Stability of Green Tea Catechins in Commercial Tea Leaves During Storage for Six Months*, published in the *Journal of Food Science*, looked at levels of catechins in green tea samples bought from stores in the US, Japan and Korea. Researchers found that all samples lost catechins after six months of storage in a dark place at 20°C – similar to conditions in a cupboard or pantry. Loss ranged from 14% to 88%, with an average loss of 32%.

Antioxidants are naturally occurring compounds in food that neutralise free radicals – unstable molecules that may damage body cells if their levels are not controlled. According to the Dietitians Association of Australia, a diet rich in antioxidants can help prevent free radicals damaging the body.

Tea is high in a class of antioxidants called flavonoids, to which catechins belong. These flavonoids are potent antioxidants, thought to be the healthy "active ingredient" in tea, says nutritionist Dr Tim Crowe. While tea is promoted as being beneficial for the heart, cognitive performance and protection against certain cancers, Crowe says a lack of research involving humans prevents making a definitive conclusion.

He is also not surprised about this latest research. "With storage, all foods will lose nutrients over time," he says. "Buying tea from wholesale stores could be better for consumers, as their distribution network may be a bit quicker than supermarkets." ■



CHOICE FORUM OF THE MONTH

Domestic air travel With the growth of budget airlines, domestic air travel has never been so affordable. But many members who responded to our domestic airline satisfaction survey story (*CHOICE*, April 2009) have been put off by credit card booking fees, abrupt changes to flight times and cancellations.

Go to www.choice.com.au/airlinesurvey to read their comments and tell us about your favourite – or least favourite – airline.



CORRECTION BREAKFAST CEREALS, MAY 2009

On page 23, we said that Kellogg's Just Right Original is high in salt. This is incorrect. Kellogg's Just Right Original is, in fact, low in salt with only 30mg of sodium per 100g.

In Using the Table, page 24, the criterion for a red light for saturated fat was incorrectly given as "1.5% or more". This criterion should have read "5% or more".

+ FREE-TO-AIR TV

Free TV, but nothing new

Will consumers really be free to view what they want in the digital TV future?

Many people have seen ads for the digital TV switchover and the "Freeview" service, and TV sets with a Freeview label will soon start to appear in stores. But do consumers need to upgrade to enjoy free-to-air digital channels?

Freeview is just an advertising campaign by broadcasters to promote digital free-to-air TV. It includes the current public broadcasters, ABC and SBS, and commercial networks (Ten, Nine and Seven) but excludes pay TV companies, such as Austar and Foxtel. In the future, up to 15 free-to-air standard- and high-definition (HD) digital TV channels will be broadcast. Each network has three digital channels, including one high definition channel. Despite the Freeview advertising campaign, it's not yet clear what new content, if any, will be available on the new channels. So far, Ten is the only network to create a new digital channel, "One", which broadcasts sports.

The Freeview labelling scheme has also been created by the networks. However, it's not necessary to buy only equipment marked with a Freeview label to get the new channels – any digital TV that has an HD tuner will be able to receive all 15 channels without any additional equipment. Any standard-definition digital TV will be able to view all the Freeview free-to-air content. To receive the high-definition channels, however, you'll need an HD set-top box.

Critics argue the Freeview logo is a ploy designed to make consumers think they are getting something new. Commentators also claim that equipment marked with the logo may have some features disabled because manufacturers must adhere to guidelines set by the networks in order to qualify for the labelling scheme. However, it's claimed manufacturers must sign a non-disclosure agreement and can't comment on the Freeview scheme to provide more detail.

Digital television commences in regional areas next year, with the final switchover to be completed by 2013 in the major cities. The federal government has also started a campaign to inform the general public about the switchover to digital TV and explain the technology people will need to access content. It has created a website, www.digitalready.gov.au, and labelling scheme to help educate people.

To find out more about digital TV, including all our recent TV tests, go to www.choice.com.au and type "digital TV" in the search box. ■



In brief

GreenPower reversal

In CHOICE, April 2009, we outlined why the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme failed consumers. Since then, the federal government has tweaked the legislation to make GreenPower purchases "additional" to emissions reductions that would have already happened. It sounds like welcome news, but the devil is in the detail, and we still believe consumers are being shortchanged. For the full story, see Letter of the Month, page 11.

Skype on the iPhone

iPhone users can now Skype, the free application that lets you make phone calls over the internet. They will be able to make free calls and send instant messages to other Skype users, as well as low-cost calls to mobiles and landlines in Wi-Fi (wireless internet) zones. The application can be downloaded free from the iTunes App Store and used on both the iPhone and second-generation iPod Touch.



TiVo package

TiVo's latest upgrade makes storing programs on your computer possible if your TiVo is getting full, although it's slow when converting files and not as easy to use as the TiVo itself. Watching your own videos or pictures on your TV may be beneficial for some but, at \$199, CHOICE believes it's too expensive for what it does.

! CAN YOU HELP?

SMOKE ALARMS Do you have concerns about smoke alarms? Maybe you've had false alarms from cooking, trouble changing the battery, you're uncertain about what type to buy, or even whether you're legally required to install one. We'd love to hear from you at www.choice.com.au/smokealarms or by email, smokealarms@choice.com.au.

YOUR CITY'S WORST SPEED CAMERA We'd like you to help us locate Australia's most notorious speed cameras – the ones that clock a reliably steady stream of vehicles at low-level speed. Visit our website at www.choice.com.au/speedcamera where we explain exactly what we're looking for.

OPTIONS TRADING SEMINARS Options trading strategies are being promoted as a "high-profit, low-stress" way to benefit from the market downturn. A company called Optionetics is running free seminars across the country. We'd love to hear your experiences of such seminars, financial strategies or even if you've traded options. Email us at money@choice.com.au.



All that glitters?

Gold is supposed to be a safe haven in uncertain times, but will it lose its shine?

As shares and property crashed and the world nudged closer to recession, canny investors steadily turned their attention to one of the world's oldest asset classes: gold.

In the past year, investment markets witnessed a modern-day gold rush; demand from institutional investors increased and consumer demand also rose. Ron Currie, Perth Mint Sales and Marketing Director, says sales of gold coins and other products increased 300% in the six months to March. "People are looking for a safe haven for their wealth rather than being so concerned with making a profit," he says. "We see people from all walks of life coming into our retail outlet. Some are coin collectors, but many are ordinary working people buying gold."

In late May, a gold coin weighing just one ounce cost more than \$1300. Buying one may seem an odd response to the uncertainty of global financial markets, and it raises a lot of questions. Is gold as safe as it's made out to be? Could it be the next investment to crash and burn? Or does it really deserve consideration for those looking to build a balanced investment portfolio?

The pros and cons

Gold has traditionally been seen as insurance against rising inflation, and its value has bucked the trend of declining share and property markets. In the six years to March 2009, the value of an ounce of gold increased by almost 150%. The steepest period of gold's ascent was between November 2007 and March 2009 (up 55%), when the global financial crises hit and Australian share and property prices nosedived.

Some financial advisers recommend their clients invest about 10%-15% of their portfolio in gold. AMP Capital's Chief

Economist, Shane Oliver, notes that the real price of gold (adjusted for inflation) is well below its 1980 peak and it has performed better than shares during previous recessions.



However, there are still risks and downsides to investing in gold. Unlike investing in a company's shares, gold doesn't do anything – it doesn't manufacture a product that people need or pay investors a dividend or interest. And, like other commodities, its price is influenced by investor demand. If everyone wants to buy gold, its price will get pushed up, possibly to unrealistic and unsustainable levels.

If gold is insurance against inflation, what happens if we have a period of deflation – when the price of goods and services actually decreases, as is already happening in other economies such as the UK? If we see widespread deflation, the inflation rationale for investing in gold becomes irrelevant.

The fear for gold is that it's now in a speculative price bubble. Its price graph, below, looks a little like shares before they started their dramatic decline in November 2007.

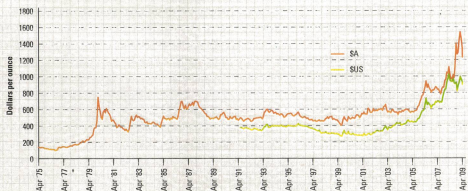
If you're seriously considering gold, do your homework, consider getting advice and don't invest everything. Gold is a very speculative and at times volatile investment which may lead to big losses or big gains, depending on when you buy and sell, as well as a range of economic factors. ■



CHOICE ONLINE

If you're thinking of investing in gold, find out how to do it at www.choice.com.au/money.

Gold prices 1975-2009



Source: The Perth Mint

MAKE A BUDGET

The first step to managing your finances is to make a budget. Our online calculator at www.choice.com.au/budget will help you compare your income with your household expenses, including fixed and variable costs, as well as discretionary spending. It's a realistic way to see where you need to cut costs to make ends meet.



ENERGY EFFICIENT DRYER

Energy efficient, cost restrictive

A six star energy-efficient dryer is now on the market, but you'll have to dig deep upfront to pay for reducing your carbon footprint.



**MIELE T 8627
WP EcoComfort
heat pump dryer**



Type Condenser

Capacity 6kg

Price \$3299

Contact www.miele.com.au

A clothes dryer with a six-star energy rating has been a long time coming, and the Miele EcoComfort is the only dryer in Australia with this claim. In contrast to normal vented and condenser dryers, which use a resistive heating element to drive the moisture from your clothes, the heat pump technology in the EcoComfort draws heat from the surrounding air and uses it to dry the clothes (the technology works in much the same way as an air conditioner or refrigerator).

Miele claims this technology saves up to 46% of the energy used in comparable condenser dryers. While CHOICE doesn't normally test condenser dryers due to limited market share, we were pleasantly surprised to see it uses about half the energy of a conventional vented dryer. This means lower CO₂ emissions and a smaller carbon footprint and lower running costs for the consumer.

Miele also claims a 20-year lifespan for its heat pump technology and offers a two-year warranty for parts and labour. If you were to keep your machine for 20 years, even at today's energy prices you would make the difference back after 18 years based on 150 cycles per year, or three times a week. More frequent users would recoup their money sooner. As this technology becomes more popular, the price may also drop and reduce payback times.

The EcoComfort is easy to operate, with clear labelling, straightforward controls and a filter located on the door that's easy to reach and clean. It matches many of the dryers on the market for features, and the heat pump technology makes no noticeable difference to the way you would use a normal condenser dryer. It is a little quieter than the vented dryers in our last test (see CHOICE, April 2009).

CHOICE VERDICT

At just under \$3200 the Miele EcoComfort is by no means a bargain, but given the brand consistently rates well with CHOICE readers for reliability, it may be worth the outlay if a smaller carbon footprint and lower long-term running costs are important to you. ■

LAUNDRY DETERGENTS

Super small, super concentrated

Do small packets of super-concentrated laundry detergent give the same number of washes as their bigger brothers?

CHOICE members asked us to compare laundry detergent doses among newly released super-concentrates. In the past six months detergent packets, and the doses, have been getting smaller, thanks to super-concentrated powder. Super-concentrates are made by increasing some of the active ingredients such as enzymes.

Along with these new products are marketing claims such as "two times concentrate" and "as many washes as in 1kg". In theory this is a positive step, as less detergent means less packaging and waste. But as the scoops supplied in both packs look similar, does less detergent mean you're getting less wash runs for your dollar?

We bought nine popular super-concentrated laundry detergents and measured the manufacturer's recommended dose. We then compared the dosage for each brand's equivalent concentrate powder, and calculated doses per pack from our last laundry detergent test in 2007. What we found may surprise you; manufacturers across all products are providing what they promise. When we measured the scoops of super-concentrate, they came to about half what you would require for the normal concentrate – in other words, most of the super-concentrates provide the same detergent dosage as a packet of concentrate twice its size. So even though you are getting half the amount of detergent, by using the supplied scoop and following the instructions you will get the most out of your super-concentrate.

CHOICE VERDICT

Super-concentrates lead to less packaging waste in the long run, which is a positive step for the environment. While the scoops appear similar between the equivalent concentrates, CHOICE is satisfied manufacturers are providing the correct dosage information on super-concentrate packaging to give you the same number of washes as regular concentrates. ■



NINE LAUNDRY DETERGENTS

Price \$3-\$10 per pack

Weight 0.5kg-1kg

A UPS is designed to provide short-term backup power and won't keep you working through a blackout.

+ UNINTERRUPTIBLE POWER SUPPLIES

Back-up lifeline for your PC

Don't let a blackout destroy your unsaved work.

Whether caused by a blackout or accidentally kicking out a plug, an unexpected loss of power to your PC can cause it to crash, losing any work you haven't saved to the hard drive. A small battery back-up system, however, can make this a thing of the past.

Generally known as an uninterruptible power supply (UPS), a battery back-up system sits between a PC and wall power socket. It monitors the flow of power to the computer for even a momentary dip in mains power, known as a "brownout", that can make a PC shut down without warning. When it detects an interruption, the UPS instantly switches over to its own built-in battery and sounds an alarm tone, as power management software on the PC then goes about saving files and shutting down the computer properly.

Most UPS units provide battery backup on several power sockets, so you can attach your PC, monitor and other devices such as an external drive. They cost as little as \$99, but you may need to pay considerably more to support a larger computer system. Unlike a generator, a UPS is only meant to provide short-term back-up power and generally won't keep you working through a blackout. In our recent test of 18 models, CHOICE found that for an average PC system with monitor and external hard drive, a home UPS of about 650VA (volt-amperes) should give you up to 15 minutes of extra power. Larger PC systems require a bigger UPS to provide the same battery-supported "uptime".

A UPS can also protect your equipment from power spikes and surges, which can cause computer crashes and damage electronic components. Most home UPS units have built-in surge protection on all battery back-up sockets as well as one or more surge-only sockets for devices such as a printer.

CHOICE VERDICT

A home UPS can be a valuable safeguard against data loss from blackouts, brownouts and other power interruptions, as well as power spikes and surges. Our best-buy picks (listed alphabetically) are:

Small (under 700VA)

Eaton Powerware 3105 UPS	\$129
MGE Ellipse 600	\$143
Power Shield Defender PSD650	\$146
Usonic ProOffice 650 UPS	\$99

Large (700VA and above)

MGE Ellipse Max 850	\$272
Opti ES1000C	\$366
Powertech MP5206	\$319

For the full story on home UPS units, see the May/June 2009 issue of *CHOICE Computer*. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552 (toll-free) or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines. ■

UPS UNITS FOR HOME

Price Starting from \$99.



Coming

Digital radios

Digital radio broadcasts are already underway in major capital cities, and if the marketers are to be believed digital radios will provide excellent sound quality and a raft of new features and benefits. We find out if all the hype is justified.



Dishwashers

Slimline dishwashers are compact and can fit neatly under a benchtop – handy

for people with small kitchens. But are they kinder to the environment compared with washing dishes by hand?



Juicers

These days you can't step more than a few metres beyond your front door before seeing a funky juice bar. CHOICE discovers how the convenience of purchasing pre-made juices compares in cost with making your own drinks at home using these centrifugal and non-centrifugal juicers.





Email or write – we want to hear from you.

Your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. See opposite for how to contact us.

Paper war

■ I'm an Optus customer with a phone/internet bundle package, which I've had since October 2007. I recently received a letter from Optus telling me to "switch to online bills now to avoid the \$2.20 paper invoice fee that starts from 1 May 2009". I believe this takes the idea of leveraging the customer in order to realise company savings to a new – low – level.

No other company I have ever dealt with has imposed a fee just to post me my bill each month. It's just plain greedy.

Ben Brown, via email

CHOICE says An Optus spokesperson told **CHOICE** the new billing process gives its customers a handy service offering increased convenience, and the company encourages all its eligible customers to use it. But **CHOICE** agrees with Ben: the "encouragement" offered – an additional charge of \$2.20 if you choose not to take up their offer – leaves a lot to be desired.

To recognise the different circumstances people might have, we'd prefer to see companies using the carrot rather than the stick to encourage consumers to change to paperless billing.

Soccer-free pay TV

■ I believe I received unsatisfactory service from Telstra via its pay-TV product, Foxtel from Telstra. In October last year, I enquired about its deal of \$99 per month, including installation and all channels for the first month. We specifically wanted the three channels showing European soccer. The Telstra representative said categorically that the deal included those channels, so we agreed to have Foxtel installed.

After it was set up, we were extremely disappointed to find we couldn't view the soccer channels as promised. We contacted Foxtel the following day and were told these channels were only



available with a premium package at significant additional cost. We cancelled the service and returned the equipment as instructed, and were told the maximum cancellation fee would be \$290. We then received a bill for \$871 for a "contract breach fee".

We wrote three letters to Telstra outlining the course of events, but received no reply. In the end we called them. This matter has caused us considerable distress as, at one point, Telstra threatened to "cancel all services linked to the account and reallocate numbers(s)". We feared we were going to lose our landline and telephone number, which are also with Telstra.

Our brief encounter with pay television made us more content with free-to-air TV. I firmly believe I was treated unfairly – I never got the product I was promised and am still out of pocket by nearly \$400 (\$290 contract termination fee, plus one month's subscription).

Jane Goodwin, Erindale, SA

CHOICE says We agree with Jane that she did not receive what she paid for. When she agreed to have a certain service connected for a certain price, a verbal contract was formed. The service she received was not as specified and she acted immediately to rectify the situation, so she should not be held liable.

CHOICE contacted Telstra and asked why it believed it was Jane who

had broken the contract. Following investigation, Telstra admitted its mistake, which it said was due to a "process error", and told us it's disappointed the matter was not resolved quickly and to Jane's satisfaction. It has apologised and waived all charges, which have been credited to Jane's account.

Although happy with her refund, Jane is disappointed Telstra wasn't more active in resolving the issue before we became involved.

Thumbs up!

■ Geoff Kalwig of Surrey Hills, Victoria, wants to give W.L. Gore a big thumbs up for paying half the price of replacing his 15-year-old Goretex jacket that had started to delaminate. He bought the jacket from a company that no longer makes them, but W.L. Gore (who makes the material) not only paid for half a new jacket, it suggested some similar jackets and where he could purchase them.

■ Cate Gouldian of Caulfield, Victoria, would like to thank QPSM in Malvern Central for fixing the unfixable: after sitting on her out-of-warranty glasses and breaking the arm, she was advised they could not be repaired and the frames were no longer available. However, QPSM managed to attach, free of charge, two replacement arms in the same colour.

■ Helen of Melbourne wants to thank Adairs for replacing eight expensive sheet sets about a year after they were purchased. The company instantly admitted there had been a problem with shrinkage and replaced both the used and unused sets.

Address your email or letter to **Thumbs up!** at the address opposite.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Undermining climate efforts

■ I am horrified by what I have just read on www.choice.com.au/green about the ineffectiveness of Australian individual and household efforts to reduce global warming, given they will allow heavy-polluting industry to increase its pollution to "take up the slack".

My wife and I have been buying 100% GreenPower for several years. We have also bought the smallest, most fuel-efficient vehicle practical for our needs and drive it as little as possible. We use water-efficient shower heads and energy-efficient light globes, and turn them off when they're not in use. We constantly consider the global-warming consequences of everything we do and take any action we can to reduce those consequences.

If it turns out our efforts and the extra expense of GreenPower are having no effect on Australia's total output of greenhouse gases, and are only increasing the profits of big industrial polluters, we would be crazy to continue to make any effort at all. Although it would be very distressing to do so, and go against everything we believe in, there's no incentive to stop us going back to using ordinary power or making any other effort to reduce greenhouse gas production. This would be a very sad situation for the planet, especially when you consider the combined effect of similar decisions being made by millions of other Australians as well.

Surely the government will see the stupidity of this situation and do something to rectify it. If it doesn't, voters will help them realise their mistake at the next federal election.

Richard Bell, Blackwall, NSW

CHOICE says We share your outrage at the federal government's attempt to undermine your actions to reduce carbon emissions. CHOICE has been working hard to address this issue with the government and it's an issue that is resonating with the public and some politicians. The government responded to the strong public concern in May when it announced amendments to the climate change legislation that included making GreenPower additional to the mandatory target – with a catch.

The government will calculate GreenPower purchases annually and take these into account in setting Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme caps every five years. The government

has guaranteed that this will achieve emissions reductions beyond Australia's national targets as it will be backed by the cancellation of Kyoto units.

However, there's a catch: In 2008, GreenPower provided over 1.8 million megawatt hours per annum to more than 877,000 households and 34,000 businesses.

The government resolved in its May legislative amendments that the 2009 GreenPower consumption levels will be considered the baseline for these measures.

For consumers like Richard, who already purchase GreenPower, their actions won't be included in these measures or serve to reduce Australia's emissions beyond the mandatory target.

And it doesn't finish there; in April the Senate's Economics Committee review of the government's climate change bill agreed that voluntary action broadly should be accounted for above mandatory targets. However, the government's May amendments have only taken GreenPower into consideration and ignored all the other voluntary efforts that consumers are taking, such as installing solar panels or purchasing fuel-efficient cars.

We know consumers want to be assured their individual actions count. CHOICE will continue to lobby government on the behalf of all consumers who have already taken steps and want to be able to take more steps in future to reduce their own and Australia's carbon emissions.

The legislation has not yet passed and there is still time for changes, so keep taking action to reduce your emissions. We will continue to lobby and we are confident we can win this one. To learn more about the climate change legislation and to join our campaign, visit www.choice.com.au/green and click on GreenPower: Keep it Real.

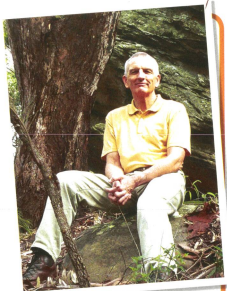


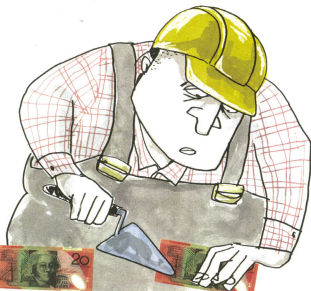
PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD

Letter of the Month This month's winner receives *The Australian Green Consumer Guide*, or any other book of his choice from the list on www.choice.com.au/books. We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all the emails and letters we receive. In the magazine, we may edit them or print only an extract.



Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au or mail to:
Letters, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204





Rebuilding your super

There are ways to take control of your superannuation. We answer your most frequently asked questions.

nutshell

- Members are most concerned about the future and poor investment performance.
- They question the quality of financial advice – some readers profited by going against the experts' advice.

The global financial crisis has decimated many Australians' retirement savings. Members have told us they did the "right thing" by making extra superannuation contributions, only to end up losing one-third or more of the balance in a matter of months.

In the wake of such devastating losses, CHOICE readers – particularly those close to retirement – want to know what steps they can take to rebuild their nest egg or limit further damage. We've compiled answers to some of the most common questions you've asked us.

To help weigh up the options, in mid-March we consulted some financial planners. Bear in mind that financial advisers should only ever be a means to an end, not an end in themselves; use the information they provide only as part of your financial education. As we highlight here, some of our readers fared best by using their own research and judgment to go against the "expert advice" provided to them.

Q1 Can I switch to safer options?

If you're tempted to switch to safer options within superannuation, it's important to know which investments are genuinely safe in this rocky climate.

You might assume funds with names such as "conservative", "defensive", "capital safe", "secure", "fixed interest" and "capital guarded" are safe. However, data from the research house SelectingSuper found that in 2008, "capital stable" super funds, for example, lost on average 8% of their value. Some had up to 55% in so-called "growth assets" such as shares and property, but only a handful of the 100 or more funds in this category had a positive one-year performance. Five-year performance was better, at about 4% per annum.

On the other hand, the funds that fall into SelectingSuper's "cash" category, which usually invest in safer bank deposits and government bonds and do not diversify into shares, returned more than 5% in 2008. So somebody who invested their balance in cash instead of the average capital stable option early in 2008 would have had 14% more by the end of the year. Those invested in the somewhat riskier "fixed interest" funds, offered by large super funds, returned 8% in 2008 (and about 3%-4%pa over three and five years). These funds invest in government and company bonds, debentures and other interest-paying securities. They're generally conservative, but there's a chance of negative returns in some years. Some put a portion of money into assets that aren't considered "investment grade", such as emerging market debt.

Bear in mind, fixed interest does not refer to the high-risk mortgage funds and debentures that haven't been assessed by ratings agencies – some in that category have collapsed in recent years, losing investors billions of dollars.

In short, you cannot rely on the names or labels on funds if you're looking for a low-risk option. You need to dig deeper to find out where they invest.

The table, opposite, compares two industry funds and illustrates how the term "balanced" is interpreted differently. The REST balanced fund invests 55% in growth assets such as shares and property, while CareSuper's balanced fund invests 75% in those assets. This goes some way to explaining the difference in short-term performance. Problems around labelling cross all superannuation funds (corporate, government, industry and retail) and categories (conservative,

balanced, growth and others) and not just industry funds' balanced options.

Q2 Can I reduce the impact of the downturn? Could I lose everything?

While switching to cash can reduce volatility and stem further losses, it may not be a sensible decision in the long term. If share markets eventually pick up, switching out of a balanced or growth fund now could leave you worse off later. If you do switch to cash now, you may need to consider a strategy to move some money back into growth assets in the future. The trouble is, timing the highs and lows of markets is notoriously difficult and missing out on the best days of a recovery can be costly. For example, between 6 March and 17 April 2009 – just five weeks – the Australian share market rose by 20%.

Diversification is a key risk-management strategy. If you choose to put all your eggs in one basket, you could lose almost everything, particularly if the investments are poor. This happened to DIY investors who invested in property-based investment schemes such as Australian Capital Reserve, Bridgecorp Finance, Fincorp and Westpoint. Investing in just one or two companies' shares is also risky. Several of our largest 200 companies lost over 90% of their share value in the last two years, including ABC Learning and Babcock & Brown, which is in voluntary administration. Paul Gerrard, a South Australian adviser and former director of the Financial Planning Association, suggests a well-diversified portfolio that includes fixed-interest investments, property investments and investments in shares in Australia and overseas, as well as making sure the portfolio is managed by a number of independent and reputable managers with good track records.

Q3 Could my fund go bust?

It's possible, but relatively uncommon. One risk is with corporate defined benefit super schemes, which are only as strong as the parent company. Generally, super fund trustees have fiduciary responsibilities to manage members' money in their best interests, and while the trustees of regulated funds are licensed and supervised by the Australian Prudential and Regulatory Authority (APRA), even funds with

THE HIDDEN RISKS OF INDUSTRY FUNDS

Are the returns reported by not-for-profit industry funds really as strong as we're led to believe?

When Chant West consultants looked at the performance of "growth" funds, which have between 61%-80% in property and shares, it found industry funds reported 6% higher returns than retail funds in 2008. One theory, which is now being examined by the regulator APRA, is that the rosy returns could be propped up by industry funds' heavy investment in direct property, unlisted infrastructure and private equity.

As unlisted property is valued every three months at best, industry funds' 2008 figures may not reflect the full extent of the commercial property market's slump. In contrast, retail funds invest in property trusts listed on the Australian Securities Exchange – the value of trusts changes every day (although the trusts' underlying property investments are less regularly appraised).

Industry Fund Services, a group representing the industry funds, defends the figures, claiming listed property trusts tend to be more highly leveraged (they borrow more) with an additional layer of fees. "Often their investors have sought to sell their holding, further pushing the price down," says a spokesman. "That's not the case with unlisted property, where several industry funds group together to buy a property for a long term."

Use the information a financial planner provides as part of your financial education – not as advice from on high.

licensed trustees can fail. Limited compensation may be available if this happens; to check your fund is registered with APRA, go to www.apra.gov.au.

Sometimes, super funds operate illegally and outside of regulation. In 2007, the Perth-based Strategic Capital Super Fund (SCSF), which hadn't been approved by APRA, suffered losses as a result of allegedly fraudulent activity and theft from the fund. And while legislation provides financial assistance to funds that have suffered losses due to fraudulent conduct or theft, there's no compensation for bad investments. The federal government paid a financial assistance grant of >

WHY FUND NAMES ARE MEANINGLESS

Organisation	Fund name	Growth assets	Defensive assets	1 year (%)	3 years (% pa)	5 years (% pa)	7 years (% pa)
REST	Balanced	55%	45%	-9.5	1.1	5.5	5.6
CareSuper	Balanced	75%	25%	-17.3	-0.9	5.3	5.2

Source: Chant West, returns to 31 January 2009.

Financial advisers were divided on whether investors should stick to their long-term strategy.

BAD ADVICE AND HIGH FEES

Many CHOICE readers told us they felt burnt by the financial advice they'd received, especially when the dubious recommendations and poor investment performance came with high fees. Some respondents took matters into their own hands and benefited by going against their planner's advice.

"I wonder why I bother to make contributions when they're always gobbled up in fees, which are calculated as a percentage of my balance. Over the last five years I contributed \$29,500 to my retail super fund. The admin fees were \$11,280 and I paid \$15,183 in adviser fees, so after tax and insurance premiums were deducted I made no net contribution to super. There has to be something intrinsically wrong with such a system." **Name withheld.**

"I changed my investment option in September 2008 against the advice of a financial planner. In hindsight the planner was wrong and I did the right thing by converting to the cash option against the advice." **Rick, Victoria.**

"I retired during the downturn, having made the decision 12 months before, and was unable to reverse it. However, the situation has got worse, since I now see financial advisers are taking their fees out of the account. What gets me is their fees are the same no matter how successful or unsuccessful the investment." **Peter, Queensland.**

"A financial planner I approached for advice about super wanted to take fees of \$3500 per annum to manage my modest account. Superannuation is far too complex to manage yourself and far too expensive to be guided by those in the industry." **Ann, Victoria.**

"The financial adviser did not want me to change over to cash. They failed to return my calls on three occasions over a period of four weeks. This was to arrange and confirm an appointment to speak with them and seek advice." **Max, ACT.**

"I was preparing to invest a considerable sum in my self-managed super fund prior to the current crisis. Suspicious of the sub-prime issues in the US and how they would affect global markets, I held off on investing for three months, against the advice of my financial adviser. I chose to invest in medium-term cash deposits and have not suffered the losses experienced by others." **Chris, NSW.**

"We were in a balanced option in August 2008 when we started our allocated pensions. We suggested to our adviser that we should take about half out of super to buy a home unit. We were advised not to do this. We lost about \$60,000 before we changed to the cash option in November." **Geoff, Queensland.**

"At the end of November 2008 we invested a lump sum into super, on advice from a financial adviser. We've since lost \$14,000 from the principal amount. Shouldn't we have been advised differently? We're 60 and this is all we have." **Susan, NSW.**



<nearly \$1.5 million to SCSF members to cover 90% of the alleged fraud losses, but didn't cover another \$9 million lost due to poor investments by the fund.

Q4 Should I stay with my balanced fund?

The conventional message from many in the industry is to stick with your long-term strategy despite the events of the past two years, but financial planners CHOICE contacted were divided on this issue. "If the appropriate steps were taken to ensure the portfolio chosen for you is aligned to your personal circumstances, timeframe and risk profile, then it is probably a good idea to follow the advice provided," says Wilson Luna of Sage Financial Partners, an authorised representative of planning company Financial Services Partners.

"Sticking where you are could be very appropriate advice or very inappropriate advice – it depends on where you are, where you want to go, and what you want to avoid," says adviser Paul Gerrard.

"You should hug your adviser for encouraging you to do the right thing and preventing you from crystallising further losses," says Andrew Carra, an authorised representative of Garvan/MLC Financial Planning. "A well-diversified portfolio and patience is your best defence during a bear market." He says hiding out in cash while you wait for the recession to end could mean you miss cashing in on the recovery, which some economists are tipping to start in late 2009 or 2010.

Queensland planner Bruce Baker says it's important investors are comfortable with both the risks and potential benefits of any strategy their

GETTING ADVICE

Super funds offer general information over the phone. For more specific advice about your situation, you might want to find a good financial planner – which can be easier said than done.

Past shadow shopping by both CHOICE and the Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) found the quality of advice provided by licensed advisers differed enormously – often for the worse.

For tips on finding a good one, go to ASIC's consumer information website at www.fido.gov.au. At a minimum, make sure the planner has an Australian Financial Services Licence (AFSL), or is an authorised representative of an AFSL holder. You can check the licensee register at www.asic.gov.au.

Financial planners sometimes provide a free initial consultation. The second appointment may have an hourly fee, but in most cases, financial planners are remunerated by commissions from your investments that are based on their recommendations. We want to see commissions banned as they cause unacceptable conflicts of interest.

If you're unhappy with the advice you receive, there are avenues for redress. Firstly, you can make an official complaint to the financial planning company. If that doesn't resolve your complaint, contact the Financial Ombudsman Service (www.fos.org.au, 1300 780 808). The adviser or company may also be a member of the Financial Planning Association (www.fpa.asn.au), an industry group with a code of practice and a complaints investigation scheme.

For information about our campaign against financial adviser commissions, turn to page 65 (Party's Over for Advisers).

adviser puts forward. "Be wary of investment dogmas that might work during a bull market, but perhaps not at other times. For example, the dogma of 'time in the market rather than timing the market' promoted by some fund managers can be dangerous, but it works during a bull market."

Q5 I still have decades until retirement. What are my options?

Firstly, there are no right answers based simply on your age. Although younger people have much more time to make up for current losses, this shouldn't mean sticking with a fund that doesn't compare well against its peers for performance, fees, services and insurance.

For those prepared to take a long-term view, with a balanced to aggressive risk profile, Luna sees "great opportunities now to invest in sound assets at very attractive prices" – but he warns to be prepared for more volatility.

"Consolidation of super accounts to minimise fixed costs such as administration fees is a good idea," says Sam Wall, Executive Manager of Technical Services at Colonial First State. "Understand how much you're paying to invest in your fund and what advice, if any, you're receiving in return. Review your insurance situation – it can often work out cheaper to buy death, disability and income protection insurance via your super fund" (see The Great Credit Protection Sham, CHOICE, March 2009).

Q6 I'm getting close to retirement and my fund is declining dramatically. What can I do?

Again, there is no correct strategy based simply on age. This is an area where you may benefit from professional advice about both your investment options and your overall strategy for retiring.

The following are some of the options put forward by advisers.

Cut costs "The only sure way to survive a major downturn in markets and ensure financial security is to reduce your cost of living and manage those costs with discipline," says Bruce Baker.

"One useful guide is that in retirement, if you keep your cost of living to 4% of your net investment portfolio balance (not counting your home), you can survive the bad times with most of your capital intact. You'll have a reasonable chance of rebuilding in the following period." Of course, you may need to have a fairly large super balance or cut living costs significantly to make the 4% guideline work.

Delay your retirement "This would provide you with an opportunity to contribute more to your super, and hopefully allow your investments to recover from the market downturn," says Luna.

Check eligibility for Centrelink payments Contact a financial information service officer at Centrelink (www.centrelink.gov.au) to find out about your entitlements, which may include a part pension and rent assistance.

Transition to retirement pension This allows you to continue working and contributing your earnings to your superannuation fund, while drawing out money from a transition to retirement pension fund to live on in the meantime.

The overall effect is you'll pay less tax and boost your superannuation fund for when you fully retire. ■

For those with a long-term view, there are great chances now to invest in sound assets at very attractive prices.



The dinner dilemma

How healthy is that takeaway meal? CHOICE compares the most popular dishes and provides healthier, cheaper alternatives.

nutshell

- Takeaways can pack in plenty of kilojoules and often have too much fat and salt for healthy eating.
- CHOICE provides plenty of alternatives that cost less.

Takeaway makes for a quick and easy dinner when you're pressed for time. Even in the midst of a global economic crisis Australians have increased their reliance on this convenient, but not always cheap, option. On average, we spend 10% of our food budget on takeaways and after a lull last year this percentage is on the rise again.

Takeaways save time and are usually a family-pleasing option and, although there's nothing wrong with them occasionally, many contain too much salt and artery-clogging saturated fat for regular eating. Chinese and Thai dishes, such as pad Thai, tend to have too much salt and some are loaded with saturated fat due to their high coconut milk content. While Indian food is generally less salty, creamy dishes such as butter chicken contain far too much saturated fat, not to mention flab-forming kilojoules. And most pizzas are very bad for salt, fat and kilojoules, especially those with stuffed crusts or extra toppings.

You don't have to compromise on nutrition for speed and convenience. CHOICE found plenty of foods in the local supermarket that will make a healthy dinner in less than 15 minutes – and cost less than half the price of a comparable takeaway. What's more, you don't need Jamie Oliver's cooking skills to prepare them.

Takeaways under the microscope

We examined the nutritional composition of a wide range of popular takeaway meals from local Chinese, Thai, Italian and Indian restaurants. The same meal cooked by different restaurants can vary widely in nutrient content, so we used average values from Australian food composition tables.

In the table, opposite, we've ranked the meals within each cuisine by energy (kilojoules) per 100g – the more energy a meal packs in, the more likely it is to expand your waistline (see Healthy Eating, opposite). We've also used a "traffic light" system as a guide to the nutritional quality of these meals in terms of total fat, saturated fat and salt.

- **Red** means the food is high in something you should try to cut down on, so it should only be eaten occasionally.
- **Amber** means the food isn't high or low so it's an OK choice – but you shouldn't eat too much of it or too often.
- **Green** means the food is low in fat or sodium. The more green lights, the healthier the choice.

Best and worst

Most takeaway meals are nutritionally very ordinary, scoring amber lights. On average, Chinese and Italian takeaways (other than pizza) are better for your waistline

but not for saturated fat and salt, while Thai stands out as the unhealthiest choice overall. When it comes to individual dishes, the Healthy Choices on page 18 list which dishes to choose and which to avoid.

Healthy eating

Nutritional excesses to avoid in takeaways are energy (kilojoules), fat and salt. Too much sugar is generally not a problem with meals of this type, so we don't include a rating for sugar in either table.

Kilojoules per 100g Nutritionists call this the food's "energy density". We tend to eat a fairly consistent amount of food over a period of a few days, and studies have shown people whose diet consists on average of foods of low energy density consume fewer flab-forming kilojoules overall. To keep the weight off, avoid too much energy-dense foods such as cheesy pizzas, fatty meat and creamy pasta sauces, and pick options with plenty of vegetables as these generally have low energy density. **Total fat** Fat makes food palatable and is an essential part of the diet, but delivers twice as much energy as the same amount of protein or carbohydrates and most of us eat too much of it. >

USING THE TABLE

Energy per 100g For restaurant meals, these figures (and the nutritional information used for traffic lights) are taken from NUTTAB 2006, the Australian food regulator's (FSANZ) database of composition tables that are compiled from analyses of meals bought from at least five different outlets in various suburbs across Sydney. For restaurant and pizza chains we used the nutritional information published on their respective websites.

Traffic lights These indicate the levels of total fat, saturated fat and salt – red for a lot, amber for OK and green for a little. The criteria that define colours are:

Total fat

- 20% or more
- 3.1%–19.9%
- 3% or less.

Saturated fat

- 5% or more
- 1.6%–4.9%
- 1.5% or less.

Salt

- 600mg/100g or more of sodium
- 121mg–599mg/100g of sodium
- 120mg/100g or less of sodium.

Price per serving These are based on prices at restaurants in various suburbs across Sydney; for pizza chains they are prices for ordering online in March 2009 (delivery may cost extra). Pizza Hut and Domino's websites both state that a serving is one slice (one-eighth of a pizza), however we believe most people would eat more than this and have taken a serving to be half a pizza (four slices).

TABLE NOTES

(A) With one serving (one cup) of boiled white rice.

(B) "Quarter chicken" and "old-style" chips.

(C) "Original chicken without skin (quarter piece)".

(D) Two pieces of original recipe chicken.

TAKEAWAY FOODS

Takeaway meals (ranked in order of energy content within cuisine type)	Energy (kJ / 100g)	Total fat (g / 100g)	Saturated fat (g / 100g)	Sodium (mg / 100g)	Average price per serving
CHINESE					
Beef in black bean sauce (A)	470	4.6	1.7	400	\$12.00
Garlic prawns (A)	520	4.9	1.6	370	\$16.00
Chicken with almonds (A)	580	6.6	2.3	340	\$12.00
Steamed duck with mushrooms (A)	630	8.1	2.9	370	\$17.00
Sweet and sour pork (A)	715	6.5	2.8	320	\$13.50
Omelette with chicken (A)	780	12.0	3.5	330	\$12.00
INDIAN					
Aloo matar (potato and pea curry) (A)	480	4.3	0.9	340	\$11.50
Beef vindaloo (A)	550	5.9	1.6	160	\$13.00
Lamb korma (A)	670	6.5	2.2	80	\$13.50
Chicken tikka masala (A)	690	6.0	2.5	150	\$13.50
Palak paneer (spinach and cheese curry) (A)	710	11.1	4.6	90	\$12.50
Butter chicken (A)	790	12.0	5.1	120	\$13.50
ITALIAN					
Pasta napoletana	490	3.0	0.6	150	\$10.00
Chicken cacciatore	540	7.5	2.3	240	\$14.00
Beef lasagne	550	5.6	2.3	230	\$10.00
Spaghetti bolognese	550	4.0	1.4	240	\$10.50
Beef ravioli	570	5.4	1.7	310	\$9.50
Pasta marinara	580	4.8	0.7	260	\$13.50
THAI					
Green curry chicken (A)	560	5.9	3.9	390	\$12.00
Chicken and basil (A)	700	8.9	2.3	450	\$12.00
Chicken and ginger (A)	700	8.9	2.3	460	\$12.00
Fish cake (entrée)	700	6.9	2.3	650	\$7.00
Beef panang (A)	760	8.8	6.1	530	\$11.00
Pad Thai	870	11.3	2.7	610	\$11.00
OTHER					
Grilled fish with chips	970	11.2	4.8	150	\$10.00
RESTAURANT CHAINS					
Nando's chicken breast, regular chips (B)	740	6.5	1.8	250	\$9.45
Oporto original chicken, regular chips (C)	820	8.5	2.5	440	\$7.46
KFC original recipe chicken, regular chips (D)	1100	15.0	6.5	470	\$8.00
PIZZA CHAINS					
Domino's Vegetarian (Classic Crust)	860	6.9	2.9	460	\$4.00
Pizza Hut Vegetarian (Perfecto Crust)	920	7.0	4.0	400	\$3.50
Domino's Supreme (Classic Crust)	940	8.9	4.3	520	\$4.00
Domino's Hawaiian (Classic Crust)	950	8.0	3.7	540	\$4.00
Pizza Hut Super Supreme (Perfecto Crust)	970	8.9	4.5	680	\$3.50
Pizza Hut Hawaiian (Perfecto Crust)	980	7.6	4.1	570	\$3.50

You can boost the nutritional quality of a simmer sauce meal by adding some frozen mixed vegetables.

The healthy choices

Item	Type	Quantity	Server	290701
Chinese & Thai				
Choose				
Stir-fry				
Braised meat dishes				
Steamed rice				
Vegetables with meat or seafood dishes				
Avoid				
Buttered or fried meat (eg sweet & sour pork)				
Salty dishes				
Fried rice				
Current Receipt				290701
Date	Amount	Tax	Total	

Item	Type	Quantity	Server	290702
Indian				
Choose				
Tandoori chicken				
Dal				
Curd with tomato and onion-based sauces (eg palak paneer)				
Avoid				
Creamy dishes (eg korma or butter chicken)				
Current Receipt				290702
Date	Amount	Tax	Total	

Item	Type	Quantity	Server	290703
Italian				
Choose				
Tomato-based pasta sauces (eg napoletana)				
Thin crust pizzas				
Vegetarian pizzas				
Salads				
Avoid				
Creamy sauces (eg carbonara)				
Thick crust pizzas				
Very cheesy pizzas				
Garlic bread				
Current Receipt				290703
Date	Amount	Tax	Total	

< **Saturated fat** These fats increase your risk of heart disease and often come from meat, cream or cheese.
Sodium Most of us consume too much salt (sodium chloride). Our bodies need a small amount, but too much sodium increases your risk of high blood pressure, a risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

Compare prices

On average, a takeaway dish from a local restaurant will cost about \$12 (and that's excluding the cost of delivery and the extra you'd pay for rice if it's Chinese, Thai or Indian, or garlic bread if it's Italian). But we found big differences in prices – a range of \$9 to \$16.80, for example, for a serving of Chinese beef with black bean sauce, and \$9 to \$11.50 for spaghetti bolognese. You may be able to save money by looking beyond your favourite local.

Fast food chains

We compared a basic meal of chicken and chips from KFC, Oporto (not available in Tasmania and WA) and Nando's. KFC had the most kilojoules, while all three got amber lights for fat and salt.

We also compared three popular types of pizza – supreme, vegetarian and Hawaiian – from Pizza Hut and Domino's. Although one of the cheaper options, pizza packs in more kilojoules than most other takeaways, and on average hits you with more saturated fat and salt.

Pizza Hut's Super Supreme Perfecto, for example, gives you nearly half your maximum recommended daily intake of salt in just one serve (half a pizza).

Quick, simple meals

Supermarkets have plenty of products that will give you a dinner for less than half the price of a typical takeaway, with no more than 15 minutes' preparation time. We've provided recipes, opposite, while the Homemade Fast Food table (page 20) shows comparative costs, nutritional information and preparation times.

Simmer sauce meals

Sauces in a jar (or sometimes a can) are now a multimillion-dollar industry, and there's no lack of choice. Chilled sauces have a limited storage life and are more expensive, but you may prefer their flavour. For Asian dishes, you can use precooked rice that comes in a sealed plastic pouch and only needs a quick zap in the microwave. In the Homemade Fast Food table (page 20) we've included a Thai chicken curry, Indian-style butter chicken and tomato-based spaghetti napoletana, all made following the instructions on the jar. You can easily give the nutritional quality a boost by adding some frozen mixed vegetables. Pappadums can be microwaved to make them crisp – and they then have a lot less fat than the restaurant version. >

Spaghetti napoletana



Cook **pasta** according to the instructions on the packet. While it's cooking, lightly fry **chopped onion** (frozen) and **garlic** (from a jar) in a little olive oil. Open a can of good-quality **chopped tomatoes** or half a bottle of passata and pour into the frying pan. Add some fresh or dried **herbs**, such as basil, oregano or Italian herb mix. Simmer briefly. Drain the pasta, put into serving bowls and top with the tomato mixture. Serve with a little **parmesan**.

Check the nutrition information panel when buying canned tomatoes, as some brands contain added sodium.

Here are three easy meals that take no more than 15 minutes to prepare and cost less than half the price of a comparable takeaway.

Homemade pizza

Spread **pasta or pizza sauce** (from a jar) on **pita bread**, wraps or a good-quality pizza base. Sprinkle on some oregano, maybe add a few **olives** or **button mushrooms** and top with grated **mozzarella cheese**. If you're keen, chopped onion, capsicum and fresh tomato are also good additions.

Cook in a hot oven (about 220°C) until the cheese is brown and bubbly – about 8-10 minutes. Top with fresh basil leaves, if desired.

To make your own pizza sauce, combine 1 small can of diced tomatoes, 2 tablespoons olive oil, 1 clove garlic crushed, 1 teaspoon dried oregano, salt and pepper. Leftovers can be frozen for your next pizza.



Chicken stir-fry



Empty a packet of **precooked hokkien noodles** into a bowl and cover with boiling water. Leave them to sit for a couple of minutes. Heat a wok or large frying pan and add **chopped barbecued chicken meat** and frozen or fresh **stir-fry vegetables** (fresh are the pre-cut, packaged version from the refrigerated vegetable section of your supermarket). Stir until warmed thoroughly. Drain the noodles and add to the wok or pan and mix through. Add a little **sesame oil** and **salt-reduced soy sauce** for flavour.

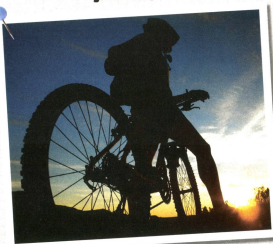
Frozen meals may be convenient, but they're not always nutritionally better than their takeaway equivalents.

< Heat-and-eat whole meals

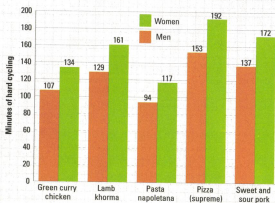
Frozen Despite the convenience of frozen meals, some of them are only marginally cheaper than their takeaway equivalents – and nutritionally can be much the same.

Shelf-stable meals These are a relatively new product and you'll find only a limited range of dishes (in the table we've included spaghetti bolognese and a butter chicken curry). They're complete meals sealed in one or two plastic pouches that you reheat in the microwave. They don't require refrigeration (unless opened) and have a shelf life (at room temperature) of about a year. ■

Burning off the kilojoules



A moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips – or so the saying goes. If you succumb to the temptations of takeaway, how many minutes of exercise will it take to burn it off? The figures below are for half a pizza or a standard portion of 400g of other meals. Keep in mind, however, that these times are strictly true only if all the food is surplus to your daily energy needs – even when you're sitting still you burn about 300kJ per hour.



HOMEMADE FAST FOOD

Meal (ranked by energy content within groups)	Energy (kJ/100 g)	Preparation time (minutes)	Total fat (g/100g)	Saturated fat (g/100g)	Sodium (mg/100g)	Approximate price per serving
Spaghetti napoletana with onion, garlic and canned tomatoes	320	15	2.3	0.6	65	\$1.10
Stir-fry with chicken and pre-cut (frozen or fresh) vegetables and noodles	435	15	3.7	1.2	90	\$2.75
Pizza made from pita bread, pasta sauce and mozzarella cheese	540	15	2.8	1.5	310	\$1.45

QUICK, SIMPLE MEALS

Spaghetti napoletana with bottled sauce	400	15	1.0	0.2	230	\$1.20
Spaghetti napoletana with chilled sauce	400	15	2.2	0.2	180	\$1.80
Thai chicken curry with bottled sauce, barbecued chicken, microwaveable rice	450	10	3.6	1.4	110	\$3.20
Butter chicken with bottled sauce, barbecued chicken, microwaveable rice	670	10	7.0	2.3	170	\$3.60

SIMMER SAUCE MEALS

Shelf-stable spaghetti bolognese	620	4	5.0	1.6	290	\$5.00
Frozen vegetable lasagne	480	10	4.3	1.9	230	\$4.50
Shelf-stable butter chicken	350	4	3.9	2.0	300	\$4.00
Frozen beef lasagne	690	10	7.0	4.0	370	\$5.80
Frozen pizza supreme	1000	10	9.6	5.5	410	\$3.00

HEAT-AND-EAT WHOLE MEALS

Shelf-stable spaghetti bolognese	620	4	5.0	1.6	290	\$5.00
Frozen vegetable lasagne	480	10	4.3	1.9	230	\$4.50
Shelf-stable butter chicken	350	4	3.9	2.0	300	\$4.00
Frozen beef lasagne	690	10	7.0	4.0	370	\$5.80
Frozen pizza supreme	1000	10	9.6	5.5	410	\$3.00

USING THE TABLE

Energy and traffic lights For simmer sauces we calculated the nutritional composition of meals prepared following the instructions on the label. The data for individual nutrients were taken from labels or, for foods such as chicken, the Australian food composition tables. For whole meals we used the nutritional information on the label. Because of the differences between brands, we used averages for all brands we found in Coles and Woolworths.

Price per serving Calculated from prices we paid in Coles and Woolworths in March 2009. We averaged prices across brands.

Beyond the wire

In our constantly connected lifestyle, CHOICE looks at the issues to consider before cutting the cord at home.



nutshell

► Wi-Fi provides easy access to your home network and the internet without any physical wires. But you must ensure your security settings are good enough to stop others accessing your network.

► Using the fastest Wi-Fi standard will make it easier to download music and video files.

It would be hard to imagine a world without the internet. Now, with only a few clicks of the mouse you can book a show, download music, pay bills and search for hours on the most trivial subjects imaginable. However, until recently you would have been confined to one room in the house, usually the study or living room, by your physical phone or cable connection.

Wireless networking changes the way the internet is used, allowing access to the web anywhere in the home and some places outside it. CHOICE outlines what you need to know and how to set up your network to operate efficiently and securely in the wireless world.

What is Wi-Fi?

Wi-Fi is a wireless networking technology that allows your laptop, internet radio or other wireless product to connect to a network in your home at data transfer speeds fast enough for you to enjoy music and video downloaded from the internet. There are several versions of Wi-Fi and any devices you have, such as an iPod or wireless MP3, will indicate its transfer speed capability as either 802.11a, b, g or n – this is usually specified on the product box. The first version, 802.11a, is fairly slow and generally no longer available. Version 802.11b communicates at speeds that allow you to browse the web without too much trouble, while version g provides faster speeds for such things as listening to internet

radio and downloading video. When looking for your next wireless device, make sure it supports at least 802.11g.

The recently introduced 802.11n draft standard supports even faster speeds and a wider range than 802.11g and it also supports earlier versions, so if you have trouble getting a wireless connection in some areas of your house, using 802.11n wireless devices might help.

Wireless in your neighbourhood

The technology to establish a Wi-Fi network throughout a community is readily available. Many local and city councils have investigated the potential for a municipal wireless network using a series of routers placed throughout an area in much the same way as a mobile phone network. However, while several attempts have been made in Australia and overseas to establish Wi-Fi cities, making wireless access free for all users within a widespread area, few projects have been successful. Sunnyvale in California is one of the few communities to establish and run a municipal network. >

Did you know ?

Wi-Fi sounds like an abbreviated word to describe wireless fidelity, however it is in fact just an invented word meaning nothing in particular. The wireless alliance decided to use the term as it sounded a lot catchier than IEEE802.11 and is easier to remember.

Without encryption, your wireless signals can be picked up by other devices, meaning others could access and use your internet bandwidth.

< Late last year, the NSW government looked at introducing city-wide Wi-Fi networks for the state's major population centres. However, as in most cities throughout the world, pricing issues such as whether the network be user-pay, free or driven through advertising, proved too difficult to overcome.

For the moment, if you want Wi-Fi access outside your home, the best places to try might be the local library or café (see Keeping Your Wi-Fi Secure, opposite).

Sending out the signal

A wireless router converts your data into a wireless broadcast and sends and receives it throughout your home. This data can originate from the internet via your modem or from your personal computer. The wireless distribution of data is similar to a cordless phone base station sending the phone signal out wirelessly to the handset. The router may include Ethernet ports at the back, allowing a local area network (LAN) connection for your desktop computer or any device that can easily be connected via a cable.

If you can't get a fast internet connection at home via cable, a broadband wireless connection from a telco such as Optus or Telstra provides wireless internet access in one box – all you need is a power point for the wireless box and any Wi-Fi device in your house can access the internet. The advantage of this solution over a wired broadband plan is ease of setup, which can be useful if you're renting. However, it's not as fast or stable as most wired broadband connections, and wireless broadband pricing plans are generally more expensive.

The wireless range depends on a number of factors, including the type of house you live in (brick or weatherboard), although under normal circumstances you can expect a range of about 30m. However, it is

possible to send out a wireless signal up to 95m, which means your internet connection may not necessarily end at your property boundary. Placing the wireless router in the middle of the home will provide the best coverage throughout the property.

The quality of your wireless connection may be affected by other appliances, such as a microwave oven or vacuum cleaner, causing interruptions to the radio frequency that carries the network signal. Cordless phones operating on the 2.4GHz band can also cause problems, although most new digital cordless phones operate on their own 1.8GHz band and are less of a problem. In some residential areas, wireless networking is becoming so popular there is evidence of significant crowding of the bandwidth. The Wi-Fi standards 802.11b and g operate on the 2.4GHz band, while the latest 802.11n also operates on the less crowded 5GHz band.

What about Bluetooth?

Bluetooth is a wireless technology that has been available on mobile phones for several years. However, until recently wireless headsets were the only devices widely available. Now there are many more for use in the home, including stereo headphones, wireless keyboards and controllers for games consoles, such as Nintendo Wii. Bluetooth works well with a Wi-Fi network and should not cause any interference as most Bluetooth devices work on a different protocol.

The unwired house

Once you have your wireless router connected to the internet, your home is transformed into a wireless hub for a wide variety of devices. Most laptop computers have some sort of wireless connectivity, usually 802.11b or g. However, if you have an older laptop without this feature you can buy either a wireless PC card for about \$100 or a USB wireless adapter.

The following are just some examples of wireless activity that can be performed in different rooms without turning on a PC, as the house is constantly connected to the web through your wireless router.

Bedroom The Logitech Squeezebox Boom (see *CHOICE* Product News, April 2009) turns on at a set time and plays your favourite internet radio station. It also allows you to listen to your music stored somewhere in the house on a network-attached storage device (NAS), which is essentially a hard drive connected to your home network.

Before getting dressed, you can quickly check your iPod Touch or iPhone for the weather and any emails that have come through overnight.

Lounge room The latest YouTube video can be streamed wirelessly to your TV via a media player. Some of the latest

Jargonbuster @!?

ADSL Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line – a technology for transmitting compressed digital video and audio over regular (twisted pair) telephone lines with the use of special modems.

Ethernet Networking using special cabling (usually Cat5 or Cat6) to connect two or more computers.

Firewall A software program and/or hardware device that limits outside network access to a computer or local network by blocking or restricting access to your computer.

IP address The number uniquely identifying a node or device on a network using Internet Protocol (IP).

SSID Service Set Identifier, also known as the network name, is what a user sees when trying to connect to a network.

TVs even allow you to send HD video wirelessly from a Blu-ray player or DVR to the TV mounted on a wall, which means no AV cable clutter.

Meanwhile, the kids can play games on the Nintendo Wii console. Its wireless controllers use Bluetooth technology, while the Sony PlayStation 3 uses Wi-Fi connectivity to help bring online games to life.

Backyard Do your banking online or make that final bid on eBay while watching the kids play in the backyard. Most laptops support Wi-Fi and the latest models support the faster 802.11n protocol. Some wireless routers feature USB ports for connecting devices such as a printer or hard drive, allowing you to share the device and print a document from either a desktop PC connected via Ethernet or wirelessly from your laptop.

Keeping your Wi-Fi network secure

Getting a wireless network up and running in your home is one of the easier technology tasks to perform. Unfortunately, however, this plug-and-play setup also makes it easy for freeloaders to use your bandwidth or, worse, get into your computer system.

When you're shopping for a wireless router, don't be confused if you see a similar-looking "wireless access point" – these may not provide the same level of security. Wireless routers generally provide additional security measures, such as firewall protection and stronger encryption, to help safeguard your home network. Some PC users might ask why a firewall is needed when the computer operating system usually has some sort of protection. However, firewall security at the router level helps keep people from even seeing that you have a computer. Imagine the router security measures as putting a fence around your house and the firewall on your computer as the security lock on your front door.

Wireless routers normally offer one of several security standards, including WEP, WPA and WPA2. WEP is the least secure of the three and WPA2 the most secure.

You should first change the default password and administrator login name when setting up your wireless router. Depending on the router, the default passwords can be as simple as "password" or "1234" and the user name "admin" or "user". The default security names could also be the name of the product, such as NETGEAR or Linksys, and potential freeloaders or hackers know only too well the series of default passwords and user names to try when searching for unsecured Wi-Fi connections. Follow the instructions carefully when setting up your wireless network and creating your own user name and password, and you should avoid any complicated adjustments later.



▲ With a router in your study, your home is transformed into a wireless hub for a variety of devices.

Without encryption, your wireless signals can be picked up by other wireless devices, which means others could use your internet bandwidth or intercept data sent through the network. This may lead to a nasty shock when you receive your next internet access or credit card bill. To make things simpler, a security feature that some devices and routers are beginning to support is Wi-Fi Protected Setup (WPS). If both your router and wireless devices have WPS you won't need to worry about setting up passwords – you can simply press a button on the router and device and they should identify each other automatically.

Outside your home, wireless access points in cafés and large shopping centres provide free access to the internet, often allowing you to automatically connect your Wi-Fi laptop computer, mobile phone or wireless device to the internet. But while this is a great convenience, you may be providing an easy opportunity for unscrupulous hackers to take advantage – so before you decide to do all your online banking down at the local café, think about what information you are sending out into the public domain. ■



Spreading the fruity hype

In the battle between jam and 'fruit spreads', CHOICE taste testers discover true value.

nutshell

► Despite the term's implication, some fruit spreads actually contain less fruit than regular jam.
► Price is no guarantee of taste; our testers rated one of the cheapest jams among the best and one of the most expensive as the worst.

The term "fruit spread" somehow sounds so much healthier and fruitier than plain old jam. The reality, however, is that while jam has its own food standard and strict definition, fruit spread and spreadable fruit don't. And in the absence of any clear definition or standard, fruit spread or spreadable fruit could be just about anything fruity and spreadable – which covers a lot of ground when food technology is involved. Some are essentially regular jam with a fancy name; others are cleverly concocted to be significantly lower in kilojoules and sugar.

Then there are spreads that are simply a fruity blend of marketing and sugars. While "100% fruit spread" may conjure images of chunky fruit minus all the fattening sugar you'd find in jam, substituting sugars from fruit (usually from concentrated grape, apple or pear juice) for regular sugar does precious little for the waistline – although some have a few less kilojoules per teaspoon overall. And watch out for so-called fruit spreads that simply use the term because they don't contain enough fruit to call themselves jam; we found two brands with only 30% fruit, below the minimum of 40% required for jam.

CHOICE put a range of jams and spreads to the test, asking 65 ordinary consumers, all staff members, to taste a selection of widely available strawberry varieties

Jam: A preserve of whole fruit, slightly crushed, boiled with sugar.

(Macquarie Dictionary)

Fruit spread: A healthier-sounding version of jam.

(CHOICE)

(one of the most popular flavours). The 10 products our trialists liked best are listed below, alphabetically, in What to Buy. Perhaps surprisingly, one of the lowest kilojoule spreads, Cottee's Delightful Strawberry Spread, tasted just as good as its sugar-heavy cousins.

Our test also found price is no indication of taste. In fact, one of the most expensive spreads, Charles Jacquin Strawberry Fruit Spread, was least popular overall.

Preserving your jam

Jam seems relatively indestructible; before refrigeration, making jam was one of the few ways people could store fruit for later use. Properly made, the sealed jars are sterile until opened and the high sugar content puts the brakes on the growth of food-spoilage bacteria. But as anyone who's retrieved a long-opened jar of jam from the back of the fridge knows, it can still go mouldy on the surface.

All the spreads in our test carry a recommendation that you refrigerate them after opening, which is good advice for maximising their safe life. But in the case of lower-sugar varieties, refrigeration is absolutely essential, even though they may contain a preservative, as once opened they deteriorate rapidly if left at room temperature.

Leaving the lid off a jam jar, even for a short while between spreading on toast, allows mould spores floating in the air to settle on the surface. Put the lid on as soon as possible to keep your jam mould-free for longer.

Can you safely scrape any mould off the surface and eat the rest? Moulds have invisible filaments that can burrow deep into a soft food, so it's safest to throw the jam away as soon as you see any. ■

What to buy \$

Black & Gold Strawberry Jam	\$0.49 / 100g
Cottee's Delightful Strawberry Spread	\$1.05 / 100g
Cottee's Strawberry Conserve	\$0.70 / 100g
Hero Strawberry Preserves	\$1.47 / 100g
IXL All About the Fruit Strawberry Spread	\$1.07 / 100g
IXL Strawberry Conserve	\$0.58 / 100g
Overture Strawberry Fruit Spread (ALDI)	\$0.80 / 100g
St Dalfour Strawberry 100% Spreadable Fruit	\$1.40 / 100g
Wilkin & Sons Tiptree Organic Strawberry Reduced Sugar Jam	\$2.06 / 100g
Young Maid Strawberry Jam	\$0.93 / 100g

JAMS AND FRUIT SPREADS

Brand (in rank order by taste)	Taste score (%)	Energy (kJ / 100g)	Sugars (g / 100g)	Strawberry content (%)	Price (per 100g)
Black & Gold Strawberry Jam	65	1114	64	40	\$0.49
Cottee's Delightful Strawberry Spread	65	600	33	50	\$1.05
Cottee's Strawberry Conserve	65	1147	66	44	\$0.70
Hero Strawberry Preserves	65	1110	52	ns	\$1.47
IXL All About the Fruit Strawberry Spread	65	893	46	42	\$1.07
IXL Strawberry Conserve	65	1123	64	40	\$0.58
Ouverture Strawberry Fruit Spread (ALDI)	65	770	44	55	\$0.80
St Dalfour Strawberry 100% Spreadable Fruit	65	936	56	55	\$1.40
Wilkin & Sons Tiptree Organic Strawberry Reduced Sugar Jam	65	850	50	65	\$2.06
Young Maid Strawberry Jam	65	1361	80	48	\$0.93
Home Brand Strawberry Jam (Woolworths)	60	1160	67	45	\$0.28
Monbulk Strawberry Spreadable Fruit	60	1129	66	30	\$0.58
Bonne Maman Strawberry (A)	60	935	55	50	\$1.41
You'll Love Coles Strawberry Jam	60	1118	65	50	\$0.46
Rose's Summer Strawberry Gourmet Conserve	55	1161	66	55	\$1.12
Woolworths Select Strawberry Jam	55	1100	63	55	\$0.55
Coles Smart Buy Strawberry Spread	50	1110	64	30	\$0.31
Grandessa Strawberry Conserve (ALDI)	50	1095	59	45	\$0.28
Golden Circle Strawberry Conserve	50	1152	66	40	\$0.55
Weight Watchers Strawberry Fruit Spread	45	561	32	40	\$1.19
Yackandandah Strawberry	45	1127	67	55	\$1.05
Charles Jacquin Strawberry Fruit Spread	40	936	56	50	\$1.26

USING THE TABLE

Taste score These are the average scores from a group of 65 tasters. They were asked to describe the jam or spread and rate how much they liked it. Each jam was tasted by at least 15 people.

Nutrients and strawberry content These are based on label information.

Price Based on prices we paid in Sydney supermarkets in November 2008.

TABLE NOTES

(A) There are two varieties of Bonne Maman in strawberry. We tasted the version available in supermarkets: Bonne Maman Strawberry (not Strawberry Conserve). ns Not stated.

CHOICE selection

▼ Budget best buy

65% Black & Gold Strawberry Jam

PRICE \$0.49 / 100g

ENERGY 1114 kJ / 100g

STRAWBERRY CONTENT 40%

One of the top-tasting jams, but only a quarter the price of the most expensive. Made with 40% strawberries, it was given the thumbs up by most of our tasters as fruity and sweet.



▼ Dieter's special

65% Cottee's Delightful Strawberry Spread

PRICE \$1.05 / 100g

ENERGY 600 kJ / 100g

STRAWBERRY CONTENT 50%

One for the kilojoule-conscious jam lover. Our tasters liked it as much as others with twice the kilojoules. Cottee's achieves this by using 50% strawberry (some of it as juice) and cutting the added sugar. Clever use of thickeners and a dash of preservative do the rest.



▼ Packed with strawberries

65% Wilkin & Sons Tiptree Organic Strawberry Reduced Sugar Jam

PRICE \$2.06 / 100g

ENERGY 850 kJ / 100g

STRAWBERRY CONTENT 65%

It's by far the most expensive on test, but is also certified organic and made with an impressive 65% strawberries. While it's reduced in sugar compared with regular Wilkin & Sons products, there are many lower-sugar spreads in our test without the reduced-sugar claim.



Sizing up fashion

CHOICE discovers that frustrating irregularities among clothing sizes suit certain sectors of the fashion industry.

nutshell

► There is no Australian industry standard for adult clothing sizes; as a result, designers and manufacturers are free to make up their own size specifications.

► Many key industry players have called for government funding of a national sizing survey to assess the body shapes of Australians to help manufacturers, retailers and consumers make a better fit.

If you've ever felt clothing sizes are quite literally all over the shop, you're not alone. While there is an Australian standard for children's clothes sizes, there isn't for adults. So in the absence of any definitive size guide, designers and clothing manufacturers base their versions of sizes on their sales history, marketing hunches and what they believe is their ideal customer. While this may suit the designers, who can manipulate sizing to give an instant "feel good" factor, as well as deter the "wrong" body shapes from fitting their clothes, consumers are often left having to try on a range of sizes to find the right one.

This discrepancy also has major implications for online clothes shopping. Last year the federal government conducted a review of the of the Australian textiles, clothing and footwear industry. One of its key recommendations was to allocate, "as a matter of urgency," \$5 million from the 2009 budget to develop a national sizing standard. While direct funding hasn't been allocated in this year's budget, the government will commission further advice on introducing a voluntary national sizing standard and anthropometric database as part of an overall funding package of \$55 million for the textiles, clothing and footwear industries.

Fashion industry experts CHOICE spoke to all agree that as part of an Australian industry worth \$2.8 billion, sizing irregularity is one of the major issues.



Getting the measure

These days, it's possible to change dress sizes without dropping a single kilo – all you need to do is change stores (see What Size Am I?, opposite). As a result, in any woman's wardrobe it's not unusual to find an assortment of sizes, ranging from 10 to 16 for a simple skirt or frock. For others, the size range of clothes available in stores might not fit them at all. A study conducted by the University of South Australia and SHARP Dummies in 2002 found that about 50% of people surveyed said they couldn't buy "regular" sized clothing as it didn't fit their body shape, and it seems things haven't improved since.

Fashion designers and manufacturers spend millions marketing and merchandising their clothing lines, yet many base their size ranges on limited sales information, a little market research and often a good dollop of guesswork. It's no secret within the industry that different labels cut their clothes to different sizes, depending on who the designer thinks is their "ideal" customer.

Danny Avidan, CEO of the Discovery Group, which owns fashion labels Charlie Brown, Lili and Howard Showers, happily admits that a size 10 in the younger focused Lili brand is several centimetres smaller than a size 10 in the Charlie Brown or Howard Showers collections. He says the sizes are developed to suit the type of customer at which each brand is aimed. "Howard Showers is for the classic 30-plus woman,



Charlie Brown's market starts a little bit younger and Lili is our junior brand for young women. For Lili we are talking about a very different body shape and I believe sizing accordingly is the right approach. I'm not focusing on the 40-year-old woman who wants to wear Lili, I'm focusing on that 80% of the market within the Lili target. We can't be all things to all people."

While Avidan concedes this may be frustrating for the consumer shopping between brands, his advice is to find a clothing label that suits your body shape and stick with it. "We are very consistent with our sizes within the brands. If you are a size 12 Charlie Brown in one garment you will be a size 12 in any other garments in the Charlie Brown line." >

What size am I?

Pssst! Want to drop several dress sizes in less than an hour? Forget about dieting or exercise and simply go shopping for clothes.

To test out just how much difference there can be between clothing sizes, I head to Sydney's Pitt Street Mall for a shopping expedition. My mission? To buy a straight black skirt (pictured above). Sounds easy, especially in this winter's range. Less easy was working out what size I was.

First stop was chain store Portmans, and in their range I fit perfectly into a size 14 skirt. Deciding I must be a 14, I head a few doors down to Sussan and grab a 14 in their range. However, when I try it on it almost falls off, so I try a 12, which is also too loose, before finally zipping up a perfect-fitting 10.

Feeling good, I set off for Country Road, where their pencil skirts are labelled "small", "medium" and "large". The small doesn't quite do up but the medium fits nicely.

Later, the size 12 skirt at Witchery proves too small and the 14 too big, so I assume that makes me a 13 – but they don't make half-sizes.

In the department stores, the body bamboozling continues. According to Sportscraft, I'm a 10 but Alannah Hill thinks I'm a 14. SABA and Lisa Ho split the difference, putting me in a 12. It's a self-esteem rollercoaster as I teeter between feeling petite and plus size depending on who's dressing me.

Once I'm done with the skirts I decide to sample a few higher-end Australian designers to see how their sizes shape up. Leona Edmiston pegs me as a "3" in her dress range, which according to the sales assistant is a "large 12" or "small 14", whatever that means. Australian designers Sass & Bide don't even bother with Australian sizing on some of their labels, with one of their jackets informing me it's a European size 40 and US 6. Finally, a sample of Wayne Cooper leaves my self-esteem in the gutter. After trying on a size 2 dress, then 3 and finally 4 (which is still too small) I realise in his eyes I'm far too big to wear any of his designs.

Feeling despondent, I head for the door but decide to make a stop at Target on the way home and try on one more skirt, the best fit being a 10. The confusion continues...

Kate Browne, CHOICE journalist

Many of the industry experts CHOICE spoke to admitted some designers are reluctant to have their clothes made in larger sizes.

Did you know?

THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

The most recent Australian clothing standard for adult men and women was withdrawn in 2007 as it was considered no longer relevant. Established in 1959, the standard was based on data from a 1926 study of women conducted by underwear manufacturer Berlei and some US Department of Commerce Standards. After 1970, several revisions were made to the standard for women using data provided by the *Australian Women's Weekly* when 11,455 female readers measured themselves and posted in the results, the last revision taking place in 1975.

Thirty-four years later, it's not surprising to learn those measurements are no longer considered relevant. It's no secret that Australians today are bigger than they used to be. And research from the US reveals that the sedentary western body may be changing shape; with waists getting thicker in both sexes and, thanks to multiculturalism, there is a wider range of body shapes than back in the 1920s. Despite these studies and abundant anecdotal evidence, there is still no definitive data to show just what kind of shape we are in today.

Overseas, large-scale body shape surveys have been conducted in the UK, Spain, France, China, Japan, the US and Germany, usually funded by government and sectors of the clothing industry. This data has been used to assist clothing manufacturers improve fit as well as identify sectors of the market that may not have been previously catered to at all. The information has also been used to develop better-fitting uniforms and safety wear, as well as assist with improving ergonomics in products ranging from cars to seating on public transport.



▲ The 1959 Australian clothing standard was based on data from a 1926 Berlei study.

< For other labels, however, this isn't always the case. Jo-Ann Kellock, Executive Director of the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries Australia (TFIA), says there are often inconsistencies within brands and within sizes due to a lack of quality control. Thanks to mass manufacturing offshore there are issues around mislabelling, mistakes during overlocking and where garments are cut in huge quantities at one time – even a slip of just a few millimetres when cutting can mean a pile of size 12 garments destined for the same store can end up all different sizes.

Slim pickings

Part of the problem is our country's growing waistline (see The Shape We're In, above), which has changed from the tapered and leaner pear shape of the 1920s to the more generous-sized woman today. Rather than keeping sizes consistent, retailers sensitive to the delicate issues around weight and self-image have simply snuck a few centimetres into their sizing. Nicknamed "vanity sizing", the rationale is that the customer will feel so good about suddenly fitting into a size 10 they will snap it up immediately.

From 1995 to 2000, department store Myer inflated the measurements of its sizes 8, 10, 12 and 14 by several centimetres, to represent what it said was a better fit for customers. Country Road was legendary for making the average size 12 customer miraculously fit

a size 10. Youth fashion chain store Sportsgirl recently acknowledged the heavier population, announcing it would be adding some size 16 garments to its collection because of market demand.

The problem goes right back to the source. Alana Clifton, lecturer in fashion design at the University of Technology, Sydney, says the lack of a national sizing standard means the university has had to develop its own rough standard for students to use as a guide, and admits it seems more generous than what's found in mainstream stores. She also says it can take time to get students to understand the difference between the design and look of the garment and the actual wearability of the clothes.

Small talk

The other, more sinister end of the scale is impossibly small sizing that controls who can wear what. With catwalk models averaging size 6-8, as well as new tiny sizing categories in the US such as size zero, the battle for body image extends across the shopping malls throughout the country.

Many of the industry experts CHOICE spoke to say some designers have an idealised type of customer in mind, and that there is real reluctance to have their clothes made in larger sizes. Even if they don't volunteer this publicly, the clothes on the rack speak volumes with tiny sizes de rigueur, especially among the higher-end designer labels.

Some openly admit the trend. Karl Lagerfeld brazenly claimed he designs clothes for "slender and slim people" when discussing the range he developed for European chain store H&M, while Australian designer Wayne Cooper is reported as having criticised the super-slim catwalk models at Australian Fashion Week for being "porky". While he said the comments were made in jest, the cut of his clothes are well known for being small. Melbourne designer Bettina Liano is on record saying she makes size 14 clothes but they "just don't sell".

Kellock from TFIA believes this policy has major implications for women's self-esteem, especially the impressionable young. "Imagine a young woman walking into a store looking for a blouse. She rummages around, finally tries one and it doesn't fit. It's too small and there's nothing else. It sends a negative message likely to have long-term impact. She is going to think, 'I'm not wanted here, and I'm not good enough'."

For older shoppers, the effect can be the same. Sarah Donges works as a personal stylist to a wide range of clients, many of whom are women in their late 30s or 40s who love fashion and have a lot of money to spend, but hate shopping. "They can be completely frustrated that they can never find anything that fits them. Several of my clients have told me if they try one or two pieces on in a store and they don't fit into them, they just give up."

Fashion online

While it's frustrating enough having to try on every size in a store when you're out shopping, buying online is even more difficult. Despite becoming more common, according to the e-tailers we spoke to, online shopping can still be a mixture of guesswork, market research and ensuring the company you deal with has a generous returns policy.

According to Sarah Pavillard, who owns Frockaholics.com.au, "ideally what we'd like to have is what each manufacturer's standard is and put it on our site but as we stock so many labels, our own resources aren't up to it at this stage and the information isn't always available". Instead, Pavillard and her team try on a sample size of every garment and make notes about the sizing. She also has a no-questions-asked returns policy.

Katrina Colla's business, frockyou.com.au, stocks more than 60 different brands. She also says sizing is a major issue and, as well as having a hassle-free returns/exchange policy, she and her staff also try a sample of garments to work out what will fit who. She also keeps a record of customer feedback to get an all-round indication of the fit of each label. Customers often send in their measurements so her team can then work out what size they will be in a certain brand.

What about men?

Most of the industry contacts CHOICE spoke to said men, in general, have it a little easier. In most cases men's garments are named by a measurement, so if a pair of trousers is labelled 38 inches, it's likely they will actually be 38 inches at the waist. However, Kellock says that for younger men's clothing, sizing has increasingly become representational and carries small, medium and large labels or 1, 2 and 3, and disparity between sizes is more common.

Avidan says his personal experience of buying men's clothes can also be a case of finding a label that fits your body type. Other men we spoke to complained about lack of length in trousers and sleeves, as well as an overall bad fit, but the consensus is the differences aren't as extreme as in women's clothes. Still, Kellock believes men would also benefit hugely from a national sizing survey. "We could mine data right down to a postcode. If we wanted to we'd be able to find out what the body shape range is for men in a certain suburb in Adelaide. How good would that be?"

Where to now?

While the experts CHOICE spoke to agree a mandatory sizing standard isn't the answer, better information about sizing is needed. The latest ABS figures show 68% of adult men and 55% of adult women are overweight or obese (using the body mass index), so it makes sense that a national sizing survey would allow manufacturers to better understand the modern body shapes of consumers. It could empower manufacturers to provide better-fitting, flattering and more comfortable clothing – a win-win situation for both the industry and consumer. ■



▲ Sizing inconsistencies pose real difficulties for clothes shopping online.

GI go

CHOICE investigates whether our national waistline can benefit from new research on the glycaemic index.



▲ Rice, bread, vegetables and fruit can have low, medium or high glycaemic index values. If you want to eat a healthy, low-GI diet, the trick is to choose the right variety.

nutshell

► Low-GI diets have been shown to help people with diabetes and pre-diabetes, but they may also help those who need to lose weight.

► Low-GI foods aren't necessarily healthy in themselves, so look for healthy foods that also happen to be low GI.

Just as we've become accustomed to the idea that there are good and bad fats, we've now come to accept not all carbohydrates are equal. Indeed, scientists have developed a way of ranking carbohydrate foods so we can tell the good from the bad. The glycaemic index (GI) categorises carbohydrate foods according to how quickly and how much they affect our blood sugar level.

When CHOICE last visited this topic in 2004, a healthy, low-GI diet was thought to be most helpful for people with diabetes, but evidence has since emerged to suggest a much wider group of people may benefit, including those who need to lose weight – something that should make our growing national waistline sit up and take notice.

Not only are we getting fatter, but more importantly, it's estimated as many as one in every four Australian adults has diabetes or pre-diabetes – both of which can be managed with a low-GI diet.

Who should be eating low GI?

Diabetes People with diabetes cannot control their blood sugar levels well. A healthy, low-GI diet has been shown to keep blood sugar levels under control.

Pre-diabetes This is where your blood sugar is higher than normal, but not high enough to count as diabetes. Since it's only diagnosed by a glucose tolerance blood test, most people don't realise they have pre-diabetes unless it develops into diabetes. Low-GI healthy eating may improve blood sugar control and reduce the risk of developing the disease.

Overweight While not all experts are convinced, there's evidence that lowering the overall GI of your diet by selecting low-GI foods may help you lose weight – see Can a Low GI Diet Fight Flab?, opposite.

Cholesterol and heart disease This is also debated, but there's some good evidence low-GI diets may help improve heart disease risk factors.

Hypoglycaemia Many people may think they suffer from low blood sugar, but experts believe hypoglycaemia isn't as common as people assume. Low-GI foods give a less dramatic and more sustained blood sugar release, so some people may find them useful to get them through between meals.

Did you know ?

How GI is measured The Glycaemic Index is a measure of how the carbohydrate in a food affects your blood glucose levels as it's digested, absorbed and metabolised. If this happens quickly, there's a rush of glucose into the bloodstream followed by a quick fall – the food is higher in the GI scale. If it gives a slower and gentler rise and fall in blood glucose, the GI is lower. It's a way of ranking carbohydrates and their effect on blood sugar, by comparing their effect against pure glucose.

It's this slower rise and fall in blood sugar that has led to claims low-GI foods give you longer-lasting energy – they keep blood sugar at a moderate level for a longer time than the sharp peak and fall of high-GI foods. Don't confuse this with your personal energy levels or your get-up-and-go: the two things aren't the same.

You cannot tell what a food's GI is likely to be just by looking at it or knowing its nutritional value. So while there are some general rules of thumb, you'll need to use a table of high, medium and low GI values – see the chart, page 32.

The gold standard for measuring GI is to use real people: a group of volunteers are each given 50g of glucose then the effect on their blood sugar over the next two hours is measured. The GI result for glucose is given a value of 100. The same people are then given a serving of the test food, also containing 50g of carbohydrate. The effect on their blood sugar this time is compared with the first test, and the GI is calculated from the average of all the volunteers. This is a complex process and there are only a few Australian laboratories that can do this type of testing.



Can a low GI diet fight flab?

A 2007 review of the scientific evidence on GI and obesity – a Cochrane review, widely considered the gold standard – found overweight and obese adults on low-GI diets lost on average 1kg more than those on conventional weight-loss diets. Not only did they lose more weight, they also lost more body fat and had greater improvements in their cholesterol levels as a result.

Two of the studies examined didn't control how much the dieters ate, but advised them to choose low-GI carbohydrate foods and include protein and healthy fats at each meal and snack. They were allowed to eat and snack when they were hungry – restricting kilojoule intake was not a primary concern.

The results from these studies led the authors of the Cochrane review to conclude low-GI diets work as well as or better than conventional diets even when the amount of food eaten is not restricted. Low-GI foods seem to fill you up more and satisfy you for longer.

However, while many high-profile scientists are enthusiastic about the potential for low-GI diets in weight loss, not all experts agree. Some believe the evidence still has a considerable way to go before it's proven, citing other studies that found little or no difference in weight loss between low-GI and traditional low-fat diets.

There have been some large studies completed since the Cochrane review that didn't find an effect, sparking further debate. And some studies suggest that any effect may be significant only in certain types of people. As ever, there are no simple answers and more research is needed to identify the real benefits, and what happens long term.

How to follow a healthy, low-GI diet

The basics of healthy eating invariably include plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrain cereals; lean meats; fish a few times a week; watching the bad fats >

GI LABELLING

GI claims appear on all sorts of carbohydrate foods; some labels simply say low GI, while others give a GI test figure. There's no food standard that specifically covers the GI labelling of foods, so you have to take the manufacturer on trust.

One way to be sure of a product's GI is to look for the GI symbol, below. Foods with this symbol must also list the exact GI figure, near the nutrition panel, along with the words "low" or "medium". To display this label the GI will have been reliably measured and must also meet other nutrition criteria, depending on the type of food – the food must be a healthy choice in its category.

The GI symbol is a not-for-profit program founded by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, the University of Sydney and Diabetes Australia. Companies pay a licensing fee to be part of the program and use the logo. The University of Sydney recently check-tested a wide range of foods that have a GI claim on the label but don't carry the GI symbol. It found eight of the 10 products it tested using the gold-standard method (see How GI is Measured, opposite) didn't have the GI rating claimed.



Did you know?

High GI carbs are not addictive Many people were surprised early this year to see front-page headlines in major newspapers suggesting high-GI foods may be addictive. The theory is that the intense glucose rush given by a high-GI, high-carb food may stimulate the same parts of the brain in the same way as addictive drugs. It's an interesting hypothesis, but for now that's all it is – a hypothesis, with some plausible explanations. More research is needed before we get too excited about it, and some of this research is about to get under way at the University of Sydney.

You can't tell what a food's GI value is likely to be just by looking at it or knowing its nutritional content.

Did you know ?

Low GI sugar CSR recently introduced LoGICane – a low-GI sugar that hit the streets with much fanfare. Its GI, at 50, is in the low range, compared with regular sugar's medium GI of 65.

Low GI sounds a lot better than medium, but the difference is not huge; using less sugar overall is another strategy. Even though the new sugar contains beneficial phytochemicals, usually removed from regular sugar, it still has the same number of kilojoules. And once you use it to cook a cake or dessert, there's no guarantee the end result will also be low GI.

LoGICane may be a useful lower-GI swap for regular sugar if you're trying to reduce your diet's overall GI, but it's not a health food. And like all sugar, it should be used in moderation.



< (saturated and trans) while getting in some of the good ones (nuts, seeds, olives, avocado); consuming low- or reduced-fat dairy foods; and going easy on salty and sugary foods.

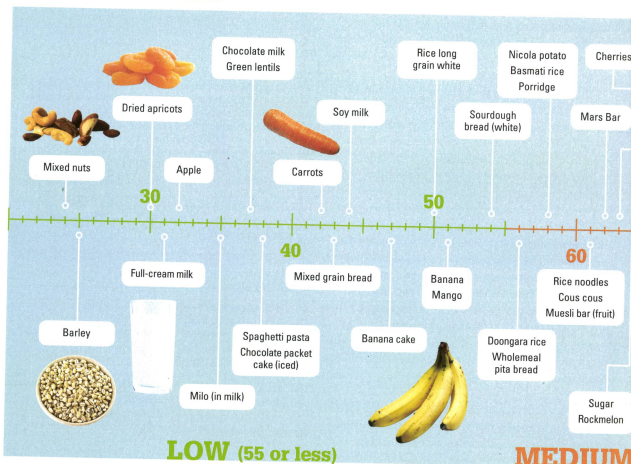
So while GI isn't the only factor to worry about, for many people it's useful to finetune your healthy diet by swapping high-GI for low-GI carbohydrates. Choose a lower GI rice variety (see the chart, below) or go for pasta instead; and swap white or wholemeal bread for a grainy seed bread.

Of course, some foods – such as chocolate bars, ice-cream and cake – are not healthy choices, no matter how low their GI. Equally, you shouldn't necessarily avoid otherwise healthy foods such as wholemeal bread or watermelon because of their high GI. As always, moderation is the key.

GI values in staple foods

Potatoes aren't all created equal. Most are high GI, with some such as desiree and mashed pontiac right up near the top of the GI scale. But other varieties such as nadine, as well as new potatoes boiled in their jackets,

GI values in common foods



are almost down in the medium range. Nicola potatoes, now fairly widely available, are a good alternative with a GI of only 58 (medium range).

Pasta When starchy foods are cooked, the starch grains absorb water – the more they absorb, the easier the body finds it to get to the starch, and the higher the GI. So while most pasta falls into the low GI category, al dente pasta is even lower.

Rice Different varieties of rice contain different types of starch, which is why jasmine rice is very high GI, while basmati and other rices high in amylose starch are medium.

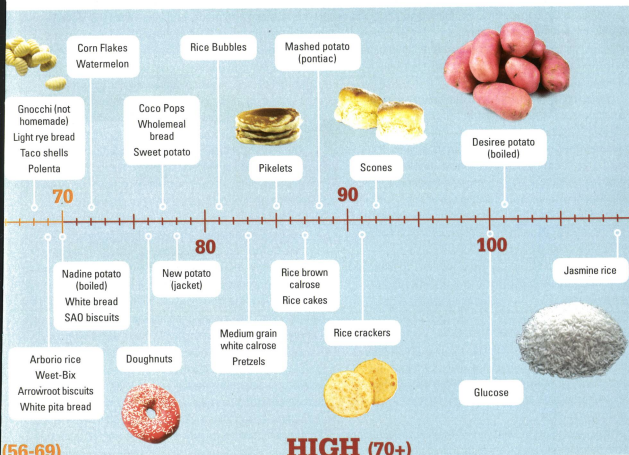
Breads are mostly high. In both regular white and wholemeal breads, the grains are ground and the outer coating of the grain is broken, so digestive enzymes can get to the starch easily. Very grainy multigrain bread and sourdough are lower – it's the acidity of traditional sourdough bread that results in lower GI. You can also buy specially developed low-GI white breads.

Vegetables Most vegetables don't contain much carbohydrate, so their GI is negligible. The exceptions are starchy vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, parsnips,

sweet potato, pumpkin and corn. The old furphy that carrots (GI 42, not 92 as previously thought) have a higher GI than a Mars Bar (62) is demonstrably wrong.

Sugar At 65, sugar is actually only medium GI. This is because each molecule of table sugar (sucrose) is made up of one molecule of glucose (which contributes to the GI) and one of fructose. The fructose heads straight to your liver for burning and doesn't change your blood sugar level. Even though many sugary foods have a moderate or even low GI, it doesn't mean they are the best diet choices – sugar adds kilojoules but no valuable nutrients.

Fruit Fresh fruit is generally low GI, although a few such as cherries, apricots, pineapple and rockmelons are medium range. The notable exception is watermelon, which has a high value of 76. Dried fruits are mainly low or medium. ■



(56-69)

HIGH (70+)



Vein pain

A new treatment for varicose veins looks promising, but there's a danger unqualified operators could benefit at the expense of patients.

nutshell

- Varicose veins can be painful, uncomfortable and lead to serious health consequences if left untreated.
- Endovenous laser therapy offers a good success rate, provided it's done by accredited practitioners.
- If you have a tendency to varicose veins, you're likely to get them again no matter what treatment you have.

Almost half of us will develop varicose veins at some point in our lives, and it's not merely a cosmetic problem. They can cause pain and discomfort on a daily basis, with some of the more persistent symptoms including swelling, throbbing and cramping of the legs. Serious complications can develop over time, such as phlebitis (vein inflammation), blood clots, dermatitis and painful vein ulcers that in extreme cases can lead to amputation.

While many treatments exist, the one currently attracting most attention is endovenous laser therapy – a less invasive alternative to surgery with good success rates reported in the hands of experienced and skilled practitioners. Its popularity is likely to increase if a proposed Medicare rebate for the treatment is approved. One concern, however, is that a surge in popularity and affordability could allow underqualified operators to set up shop, hoping to profit from unsuspecting patients, and encourage unnecessary procedures.

CHOICE looks at the various treatment options for varicose veins (many of which are already covered by Medicare).

What are varicose veins?

There are two venous systems in our legs, deep veins and superficial veins, which are joined by perforator veins. Most varicosities are due to problems with the main superficial, or saphenous, veins, that collect blood from other surface veins.

One-way valves in veins direct the flow of blood back to the heart. In the legs – the most common location of

varicose veins – these valves are particularly important because the blood is flowing against gravity. When one or more valves fail, blood can pool in the section, causing the bulgy, tortuous appearance of varicose veins. Weak vein walls exacerbate the problem. When the blood flows backwards because of weak valves, it is known as reflux.

Deeper veins, which lie within and between muscles, are not affected in the same way, because muscular contraction (when walking and so on) compresses the veins, creating a pumping action that returns blood to the heart and provides support. The veins near the surface, however, have little support.

Not all varicosities are caused by valve problems in the saphenous or perforating veins; any superficial leg vein can become varicose, although these veins are usually quite small and cause few symptoms. However, the severity of the symptoms isn't always related to the appearance of the veins, and even large, obvious ones may cause little or no discomfort.

Varicose veins serve no useful purpose: alternative pathways have already been formed to bypass the abnormal varicose veins and return blood to the heart. Compressing, closing off or eliminating varicose veins improves circulation and relieves many of the symptoms.

Who gets varicose veins and why?

In Western nations it's estimated about 40% of people suffer from varicose veins, and it appears to be hereditary. Susceptibility varies among cultures, although it's not clear if this is genetic or lifestyle-related (poor diet and lack of physical activity may be partly responsible).

Women seem to get varicose veins more than men, most likely due to the hormone oestrogen. Taking oestrogen-based contraceptive pills or hormone replacement therapy also appears to increase risk. Women who have had children are more likely to get varicose veins in the future, as hormones in pregnancy relax vein walls, and the weight of the uterus puts more pressure on leg veins. Varicose veins that occur during pregnancy often go away within a few months of giving birth.

Poor diet, obesity, smoking and a sedentary lifestyle increase risk, as does standing still for long periods of time.

Getting treatment

As there's no cure for varicose veins, there is also no guarantee one treatment will fix the problem for life. The earlier you treat varicose veins, the more successful the outcome. Your first port of call should be your GP, who can refer you to a phlebologist, vascular specialist or other surgeon who practises phlebology. An ultrasound "map" of your blood vessels will provide an overview of how they're functioning and where the problems lie, and what the future holds if you choose to do nothing.

Treatment may require several stages. For severe varicosities, the first stage is usually to treat the root of the problem: the saphenous veins. The reflux in these veins affects the tributary veins that run from them. Once the saphenous veins have been fixed, affected perforator and tributary veins can then be treated (see Treatment Procedures, page 36). Spider veins are almost always associated with deeper vein problems, so further >

Legs saved by laser

Ronald Jones is more than happy with the endovenous laser treatment he received last year. He'd been suffering from extensive skin problems, including ulcers that affected his legs, a result of chronic venous insufficiency. By the time he was referred to a Sydney specialist, his leg was going black and without immediate treatment would have been amputated (right).



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RONALD

The process itself was straightforward, and Ronald watched the whole thing on the ultrasound monitor. While Ronald still suffers from circulation problems, treating his varicose veins has resulted in a huge improvement and saved his leg (left).



ENDOVENOUS LASER THERAPY

At up to \$4000 a pop or even more, this increasingly popular treatment isn't cheap. And in the wrong hands, it may be ineffective or even unsafe. If you're undergoing endovenous laser therapy, it's important to know the person is an accredited laser operator trained in its operation.

The machines are readily available, so in theory anyone could buy and use one. Although they're expensive to purchase, some companies overseas are giving away the machines for free, relying on recouping their largesse from the high cost of consumables, such as the laser probes themselves. According to Dr Kurosh Parsi, President of the Australasian College of Phlebology, this has led to sometimes disastrous results in the United States, such as probes breaking off in the blood vessels (because they were used too often) and long-term complications from inappropriate or incorrect use.

Endovenous laser therapy has been recommended for inclusion on the Medical Benefits Schedule, which means it would then attract a Medicare rebate, possibly before the end of the year. However, there is concern

that many people put off by the idea of undergoing surgery who wouldn't otherwise have sought treatment for varicose veins will come forward, not only increasing demand for services but also enticing practitioners who haven't undertaken proper training to jump on board the taxpayer-funded gravy train.

The Australasian College of Phlebology has petitioned the government to limit Medicare rebates to patients who attend accredited practitioners; a position supported by the Australian and New Zealand Society of Vascular Surgeons. The society's president, Dr Michael Grigg, points out that a thorough diagnostic assessment takes more than just knowledge of the technique, which is not difficult to learn, but also a good understanding of vascular medicine. "We have a saying in surgery: it takes about three months to learn how to do a procedure, but it takes three years to learn when to do it."

CHOICE supports the call for accreditation, because this would encourage consumers to choose practitioners who have been fully trained to safely and effectively use the procedure.

Medicare rebates only apply to medically necessary procedures, so your varicose vein treatment needs to be more than just a cosmetic concern.

< investigation is needed to identify the cause (which should be treated first).

Most treatments are done in an office or clinic setting with local or no anaesthetic. Ligation and stripping takes place in hospital and may require general anaesthetic.

After any treatment, you must wear compression stockings all day and night for about two weeks to assist the process of sealing veins and preventing clots. Regular walking is an important part of healing, although you may have to avoid more strenuous exercise for a while. The physician will conduct an ultrasound examination soon after the treatment to ensure there are no clots.

Treatment procedures

Microsclerotherapy and ultrasound-guided sclerotherapy

An irritating liquid or foam is injected into the blood vessel, causing it to swell and stick together, aided by external pressure from compression stockings. The blood vessel is eventually absorbed by surrounding tissue and fades from view. This treatment is often used in conjunction with vascular ultrasound to guide the injections in larger and/or deeper veins. This ultrasound-guided sclerotherapy costs about \$800-\$1000, with a \$300 Medicare rebate; sclerotherapy for small veins and spider veins is more like \$300-\$500, with a \$100 rebate.

Ambulatory phlebectomy A tiny incision is made over the vein which, using a phlebectomy hook, is pulled out until it breaks or cannot be pulled any further. The process is repeated along the entire length of the vein to be extracted, and no stitches are necessary. It costs about \$900, with a \$300 rebate.

Endovenous laser therapy The vein is punctured near the knee or ankle, depending on which part of the vein is being treated, and a fine laser probe inserted. The laser is activated, causing the vein walls to fibrose and close off as it's withdrawn. The procedure involves minimal discomfort and local anaesthetic is used to reduce pain. A Medicare rebate of about \$600 is in the pipeline, but for now you're looking at costs of between \$3000 and \$4000 per treatment.

Radiofrequency ablation Similar in technique and outcome to endovenous laser therapy, radiofrequency ablation uses a catheter to heat the blood and destroy the vein. Costs and risks are similar to endovenous laser therapy, but there's no Medicare rebate available.

Surgery An incision is made at the top of the leg over the vein, which is then cut and tied off (ligation). A thin wire is inserted down the length of the vein and the vein pulled out – stripping. Smaller incisions may be needed to separate connecting veins along the way. It costs about \$2000 plus hospital and anaesthetic costs. The Medicare rebate is about \$500-1000, but check with your doctor for a better estimate.

Treatment risks

All types of treatment are likely to result in temporary bruising, aching, discolouration and inflammation. Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and temporary numbness due to nerve damage are rare. For one treatment, sclerotherapy, additional but rare risks include pockets of blood trapped in veins (this is different from DVT), pigmentation along treated veins, allergic reaction to the solution and skin ulceration.

Costs and rebates

Medicare rebates apply to most procedures considered medically necessary, so your varicose vein treatment needs to be more than just a cosmetic concern, and veins should be 2.5mm or more in diameter and have reflux. The cost and rebate figures we've provided are only a guide for comparative purposes, and your doctor will be able to give you a more accurate guide to out-of-pocket expenses.

Private health insurers don't cover most treatments because it doesn't take place in a hospital, however they may cover part of the cost of post-operative compression stockings. ■

Did you know ?

NON-SURGICAL MANAGEMENT OF VARICOSE VEINS

Regular exercise, a low-fat diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables, and keeping your weight at a healthy level can help prevent varicose veins becoming problematic. Elevating your legs when possible can also provide relief, as can compression stockings, which are elastic stockings that use graduated pressure to squeeze your veins and stop blood from pooling or flowing backwards.

A large review of clinical trials of horse chestnut tablets containing escin found it reduced pain, itching and swelling, at least in the short term. It appears to be safe, although it may interact with some medicines (check with your doctor), and its long-term effectiveness hasn't been established.

Some cosmetic creams claim to reduce the appearance of spider veins, but there's no evidence they have anything more than a minor effect.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about varicose veins and their treatment, see the website of the Australasian College of Phlebology (www.phlebology.com.au) or phone (02) 9386 1811. Fellows of the College accredited in performing endovenous laser therapy or radiofrequency ablation are listed, while Members of the College certified in sclerotherapy are listed as "Certified Sclerotherapists".

On test

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Inside

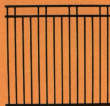
38 Camera phones



45 Electric heaters



54 Pool fences



Plus

42 66cm TVs

48 Microwaves

51 Speaker docks

58 Change tables

For more product tests go to www.choice.com.au

CHOICE has its own testing laboratories, where experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian standards, as well as developing our own in order to match the way consumers use a product in reality. We buy the products we test, to maintain our independence from manufacturers and so that we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.



CHOICE Best Buy CHOICE calls a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Best Buys.

CHOICE Green Buy CHOICE calls a product a Green Buy if it delivers both good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.

CHOICE Video When you see the CHOICE Video icon, you can find more information about that story at choice.com.au.



Picture perfect

No longer just a phone, some of the latest mobiles work equally well as a camera.

nutshell

► Mobile phones can now deliver good quality photos, but make sure your next phone also performs the basic functions well.
► Many new models include a GPS navigation receiver.

There are now more active mobile phones than people in Australia, with more than 21 million currently in circulation. And while most are good at performing basic tasks such as making a call, sending and receiving SMS

What to buy \$

LG KC910 Renoir	\$599
Nokia N78	\$578
Nokia N85	\$919
Nokia N95 8GB	\$1059
Samsung SGH-F480 Touchwiz	\$699
Sony Ericsson C905	\$999
Nokia 6220 classic	\$689

and keeping contacts up to date, photographic quality is often not a strong feature. CHOICE tested 21 of the latest mobile phones that function well as a phone and also deliver high-quality photos. All work on a 3G network, which means they can deal with multimedia content such as online video and music downloads.

Why no iPhone?

While the Apple iPhone is without doubt very popular, camera performance is not its strongest feature. In fact, it has only a two megapixel camera and is unable to capture video at all. Check out our NextG story in *CHOICE*, Dec 2008/Jan 2009, to see how the iPhone performs on this network. >

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE												
	Phone										Camera		
	Overall phone score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	SMS score (%)	Music player score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Durability score (%)	Sensitivity score (%)	Battery score (%)	Calling time (hours)	Charging time (minutes)	Overall camera score (%)	Picture quality score (%)	Display score (%)
Brand / model (in rank order)													
LG KC910 Renoir	71	72	77	67	67	75	73	63	4	130	71	59	93
Nokia N78	69	68	64	71	56	65	72	72	3	100	75	60	90
Nokia N85	67	64	54	77	60	40	73	80	4	170	74	60	92
Nokia N95 8GB	67	67	73	64	53	60	72	70	3	90	69	67	92
Samsung SGH-F480 Touchwiz	67	64	77	64	59	73	76	70	4	170	66	59	88
Sony Ericsson C905	67	70	39	70	64	81	76	61	4	110	69	63	88
Nokia 6220 classic	66	68	57	57	58	50	71	57	2	100	77	70	88
Nokia E71	65	62	54	54	61	69	74	83	4	120	69	48	90
Nokia 6210 Navigator	65	65	51	62	58	63	69	64	3	90	72	55	93
Nokia N96	65	66	57	74	57	62	71	56	3	86	69	57	93
Samsung SGH-I900 Omnia	65	55	64	59	55	69	77	90	8	120	68	65	88
Sony Ericsson C902	65	60	63	62	62	86	76	66	3	120	64	50	84
Sony Ericsson W902	65	63	38	70	61	73	71	72	4	125	68	53	88
LG KU990 Viewty	64	64	73	55	59	73	68	47	3	155	65	58	90
Sony Ericsson C702	64	67	65	60	59	68	76	61	3	160	64	49	88
Sony Ericsson Xperia X1	64	63	77	54	63	40	73	83	6	185	66	53	92
Samsung I8510 innov8	63	52	55	67	60	68	72	73	6	155	67	68	95
Nokia 6600 slide	62	62	53	61	58	67	73	63	3	100	63	53	90
Samsung SGH-U900 Soul	62	60	73	59	56	73	75	53	4	150	60	58	92
Sony Ericsson W980i	62	67	50	71	61	85	76	74	4	120	52	39	92
Nokia E66	61	62	36	54	55	70	68	66	3	90	68	41	92

HOW WE TEST

Ease of use A user panel assesses the instruction manual and looks at everyday use such as ergonomics, answering a call, storing a number into memory and dialling a number stored in memory. Our testers assess the ability of the phone to perform as a **music player** and score the **sound quality** during playback.

SMS Our testers write and receive text messages and look at the suitability of the display and keypad for SMS.

Sound Our testers carry out a number of acoustic measurements, such as frequency response, and they subjectively rate the sound quality of calls.

Durability The phones are put into a turning barrel, simulating falls from a table or out of a pocket. After five, 15 and 25 turns, the phones are checked for damage. Our testers also carry out a water resistance test.

Battery This is mainly based on the time-in-use result but the charging time and battery status warning are also considered.

Calling time The batteries are continuously drained under various conditions in a network simulator. The time shown in this column in the table is when working under a 3G network environment.

Sensitivity Our testers measure the receiving sensitivity and sending power of the phone (particularly important in areas with poor network coverage) in both the 900MHz and 1800MHz bands.

Camera performance is scored separately.

- **Picture quality** Our testers assess the phone's digital camera capabilities in different lighting situations. The resulting images are then printed and rated for resolution, colour reproduction and noise.
- **Display score** is determined by looking at colour impression, saturation and sharpness with the image at full size.
- **Camera ease of use** is assessed by checking how well the phone starts up in camera mode, the quality of the viewfinder and how easy it is to take and save a photo.
- **Versatility** Testers assess each phone against a compact camera to determine its suitability as a digital camera. Functions such as optical zoom, flash, removable memory/hard drive and autofocus are considered.
- **Battery score** for use as a camera is carried out by seeing how long it takes to drain the battery when taking photos on the mobile phone.
- **PC connectivity** measures the capability of transferring photos to a PC either via cable or wireless.

Ranking score (%)	FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS					Price (\$)
	PC connectivity score (%)	Camera resolution (megapixels)	Pictbridge	Wifi	GPS	Charging via USB	Memory card slot	Internal memory (>64MB)	Weight (grams)	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Contact		
1	100	8.0	✓	✓	✓	✓	Micro-SD		112	108 x 56 x 17	www.lge.com.au	599	
7	100	3.2		✓	✓		Micro-SD	70MB	102	113 x 49 x 17	www.nokia.com.au	578	
3	100	5.0		✓	✓		Micro-SD	74MB	130	103 x 50 x 17	www.nokia.com.au	919	
4	50	5.0	✓	✓	✓			8GB	131	99 x 54 x 21	www.nokia.com.au	1059	
2	80	5.0				✓	Micro-SD	200MB	104	98 x 56 x 13	www.samsung.com/au/	699	
8	100	8.1	✓	✓	✓	✓	MS Micro	100MB	135	104 x 50 x 20	www.sonyericsson.com.au	999	
5	100	5.0					Micro-SD	120MB	94	109 x 47 x 17	www.nokia.com.au	689	
00	100	3.2		✓	✓		Micro-SD	110MB	130	114 x 59 x 13	www.nokia.com.au	779	
2	100	3.2	✓		✓		Micro-SD	120MB	119	103 x 50 x 17	www.nokia.com.au	599	
5	80	5.0		✓	✓		Micro-SD	16GB	124	103 x 55 x 19	www.nokia.com.au	1299	
2	60	5.0		✓	✓	✓	Micro-SD	8GB	119	112 x 58 x 14	www.samsung.com/au/	849	
5	80	5.0	✓			✓	MS Micro	160MB	108	108 x 49 x 13	www.sonyericsson.com.au	699	
0	100	5.0	✓			✓	MS Micro		102	110 x 50 x 14	www.sonyericsson.com.au	789	
2	60	5.0	✓				Micro-SD	110MB	112	104 x 56 x 18	www.lge.com.au	299	
3	80	3.2	✓		✓	✓	MS Micro	150MB	105	106 x 49 x 17	www.sonyericsson.com.au	559	
9	80	3.2		✓	✓	✓	Micro-SD	280MB	158	111 x 52 x 19	www.sonyericsson.com.au	1499	
4	80	8.0	✓	✓	✓	✓	Micro-SD	8GB	140	107 x 55 x 21	www.samsung.com/au/	899	
5	70	3.5	✓			✓	Micro-SD		112	93 x 45 x 15	www.nokia.com.au	569	
8	80	5.0				✓	Micro-SD	120MB	112	107 x 51 x 15	www.samsung.com/au/	499	
2	50	3.2	✓			✓		8GB	101	92 x 46 x 18	www.sonyericsson.com.au	649	
6	100	3.2		✓	✓		Micro-SD	110MB	123	108 x 50 x 15	www.nokia.com.au	749	

USING THE TABLE

The overall phone score is made up of:

- Overall camera score: 35%
- Ease of use: 18.75%
- SMS: 10%
- Music player: 10%
- Sound quality: 8.75%
- Durability: 7.5%
- Sensitivity: 5%
- Battery life: 5%

The overall camera score is made up of:

- Camera picture quality: 28.5%
- Display: 14.3%
- Ease of use: 14.3%
- Versatility: 14.3%
- Battery score used as a camera: 14.3%
- PC connectivity: 14.3%

Features see What to Look For, page 41.

Price Recommended retail, as of April 2009.

TABLE NOTES

All models on test support web browsing, handsfree, flight mode, FM radio, come with a stereo headset and can record and playback video. All, except the Nokia 6600 slide, support HSDPA.

What to buy

71% LG KC910 Renoir

PRICE \$599

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent display.
- GPS support.
- Phone can be charged using a USB connection.
- Good ease of use as a mobile phone.

BAD POINTS

- Not a standard USB connection.
- Triband support only.



69% Nokia N78

PRICE \$578

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent display.
- GPS support.
- Easy to use as a camera.
- Very good battery performance when used as a camera.

BAD POINTS

- Can't charge phone via USB connection.



67% Nokia N85

PRICE \$919

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent display.
- Very good ease of use as a mobile phone.
- Easy to use as a camera.
- GPS support.
- Very good battery performance when used as a camera or as a mobile.

BAD POINTS

- Can't charge phone via USB connection.
- Not as durable as most other phones on test.
- Takes nearly three hours to fully charge.



67% Nokia N95 8GB

PRICE \$1059

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent display.
- GPS support.
- Easy to use as a camera.
- 8GB internal memory.
- Very good battery performance when used as a camera.

BAD POINTS

- Can't charge phone via USB connection.
- No support for removable memory.



67% Samsung SGH-F480 Touchviz

PRICE \$699

GOOD POINTS

- Good SMS performance.
- Easy to use as a mobile phone.

BAD POINTS

- No standard headphone jack.
- Takes nearly three hours to fully charge.
- Triband support only.



67% Sony Ericsson C905

PRICE \$999

GOOD POINTS

- Very good durability.
- Very easy to use as a camera.
- GPS support.

BAD POINTS

- No standard headphone jack.
- Not a standard USB connection.
- Poor SMS performance.



66% Nokia 6220 classic

PRICE \$689

GOOD POINTS

- Very easy to use as a camera.
- Lightest phone on test.
- Good camera picture quality.
- GPS support.

BAD POINTS

- Short calling time on single battery charge.
- Can't charge phone via a USB connection.
- No standard headphone jack.



About the rest

- Two models on test offer a QWERTY keyboard, with two very different designs. The Nokia E71 is a BlackBerry-type phone, while the Sony Ericsson Xperia X1 has a keyboard that slides out in landscape mode.
- While many of the models include an integrated GPS receiver, the Nokia 6210 Navigator also includes a compass and voice-assisted directions, features normally found only in a dedicated car GPS.
- Not only is the Nokia N96 a solid all-round phone, it is also the best music player on test with an impressive 16GB of internal memory to hold lots of photos and music. But you only get about three hours' talk time on a full charge.
- The Samsung innov8 and Omnia, and Sony Ericsson W990i offer 8GB of internal storage, which is great if you want to use your phone as an external hard drive. The Samsung Omnia's touch screen is also easy to use for messaging and delivers more than eight hours of talk time.
- Our testers found the Sony Ericsson W902 performed better overall as a camera than the C702, which is surprising as Sony uses the W prefix to signify a Walkman (music) phone while the C prefix is for their Cybershot (camera) brand. However, if you also like to use SMS or are in a difficult mobile reception area, the C702 or C902 could be a good option.
- The Samsung innov8 had one of the best picture quality and displays on test and the 8GB internal memory is a handy feature. However, it was the most difficult to use for general phone tasks.
- The Nokia 6600 performs reasonably well in most areas and is one of the more affordable models. However, it is also the only model that does not support HSDPA, which means it won't perform as well as the other phones when used on Telstra's NextG network (see What to Look For, opposite).

What to look for

FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

- **Camera resolution** A three-megapixel resolution is generally the norm, with the latest mobile phones offering up to eight megapixels which should be enough to produce an A4-sized photo quality print.
- **GPS** While most of these phones provide support for online map services such as Google Maps, a dedicated GPS receiver allows you to use your phone to find out exactly where you are without having to get the information via an often expensive data transfer from a mobile network provider. Software solutions such as Google Maps offer similar navigational features using your network access to plot your position, however you will need to factor in the cost of network access to download the appropriate maps.
- **Bluetooth** A wireless radio technology that allows a range of electronic devices, such as mobile phones, mobile phone car kits, computers and PDAs, to easily communicate with each other over a range up to 10 metres. **Stereo Bluetooth (A2DP)** allows you to listen to your music without cables via a pair of Bluetooth stereo headphones. All models on test support stereo Bluetooth.
- **Headphone connection** A phone with a 2.5 or 3.5mm jack will allow you to use a standard set of headphones to listen to music, while proprietary and mini USB connections force you to use special headphones that are not as readily available. All except the Samsung SGH-F480, SGH-U900, Sony Ericsson C905, C702 and Nokia 6220 classic use a standard headset.
- **A memory card** allows you to store photos and video clips and transfer them to a computer or printer. Not all the phones with a memory card slot provide a card, so you may have to buy one separately. Check to see the exact type of memory you'll need, as the cards are all tiny and look very similar but aren't interchangeable.
- **Internal memory** Aside from keeping contacts and irritating ringtones, internal memory is also handy for recording still images and small video files.

→ **Wi-Fi capability** This allows you to browse the internet and send emails using your existing Wi-Fi wireless connection at home or at a Wi-Fi hotspot when you're out and about. This generally costs a lot less than using the mobile phone network to transfer data. See *Beyond the Wire*, page 21.



A three-megapixel resolution is generally the norm for camera phones, although some offer up to eight megapixels, which should be enough to produce an A4-sized photo quality print.



→ **Computer connection type** A USB connection of any type also lets you transfer files to your computer. All the phones on test can be used as a removable hard drive on your computer with some models using a mini or micro USB connection.

Mobile network options

- **GSM bands** indicate support for various frequencies around the world. Phones that offer support for 850/900/1800/1900MHz frequencies are called quad band, while models that offer support for either 850MHz or 900MHz as well as 1800/1900MHz are called triband phones. The Samsung SGH-F480, SGH-U900 and LG models are triband, with the rest being quad band.
- **UMTS (Universal Mobile Telecommunications System)** is used to describe the system within which 3G networks operate. All the models on test should work on a 3G network.
- **HSDPA (High Speed Downlink Packet Access)** offers faster network performance than 3G, the current network speed king. This means faster video and music downloads to your mobile phone and support on Telstra's Next G and Optus' 'yes' network. Confirm that your carrier will provide support for the phone before you make the purchase.



Relatively small, relatively flat

Poor sound and uninspiring pictures dominate these TVs.

nutshell

► Over the past few TV tests we've seen an overall decline in sound quality.
► Picture quality of all the models on test is noticeably degraded when viewed from an angle.

This is as small as LCD TVs get – any smaller than these 66cm screens and they're about the same size as a large computer monitor. In the past, the rule of thumb was that smaller screens had better picture quality because it's harder to see imperfections when sitting at a normal viewing distance. The models in this test appear to be the exception to that rule and consequently we can't recommend any of them. Even the best model for picture quality, the Samsung, has a lower score than many of the bigger screens in our other tests (see www.choice.com.au/tv, or www.choiceextra.com.au).

If you rely entirely on your television for sound rather than a separate sound system, you may be better off compromising on picture quality. The Panasonic has better sound than the rest, but it's a long way off hi-fi quality. Its picture has a yellow tinge when watching standard and high-definition sources, but looks much better when playing a computer game.

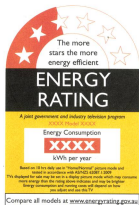
Energy labels

All TVs must have an energy label (right) as of April 2009. After October, any that have a rating below one star can't be sold in Australia. The televisions on test were purchased before the directive, but we put them through a test with only minor differences in standby energy measurements to give us an indication of how they would perform.

The Samsung only just makes the cut at one and a half stars. The Voxson does much better with four stars and the table below shows how the rest scored.

The TV energy labels work in much the same way as those for washing machines and refrigerators.

- More stars means greater efficiency.
- If the TV gets fewer than six stars it carries the label, below.
- TVs with seven or more stars get an extra star panel on top.
- The most important factor is the actual energy used, which is calculated based on 10 hours' use per day over 365 days. This includes energy used when the TV is on standby during the other 14 hours of the day.
- These figures are based on the TV being in its "Home/Normal picture mode" setting. Where possible, by reducing the brightness and backlight intensity you may be able to reduce the television's power usage even further. >



PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES				SPECIFICATION
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	HD digital tuner score (%)	In-built DVD player	HDMI inputs	USB ports	Flash card port	Number of energy stars based on our test
Panasonic Viera TX-26LXD8A	57	46	55	62	58	91		2		✓	2.5
Voxson VLCD26RDW	57	57	45	42	74	82	✓	2	1	✓	4
Hisense HSL2629HDI	56	51	45	52	68	89		3	1 (A)		3
Samsung LA26A450C1D	56	62	35	59	44	87		3			1.5
Celestial LT2668HD	55	55	35	53	61	92		2			2.5
Toshiba Regza 26AV500A	55	53	40	54	59	92		2			2.5
TEAC LCDV2655HD	50	39	35	52	67	87	✓	2	2	✓	3

Profiles

We do not recommend any of the models on test, so there is no What to Buy list. However, the following is a brief description of the good and bad points of each model on test.



The **Panasonic** has a flash card port and headphone socket. Its remote control is easy to use and can control certain other Panasonic devices, but there's no previous channel toggle. Its picture has a very noticeable yellow tinge. Using the channel and volume controls on the TV is tricky and in this mode not all the menu functions are accessible. There's also no on/off standby button.



The **Voxson** has an in-built DVD player, a USB and flash card port. Its sound quality is poor, the remote control is not easy to use and setting up favourites is not intuitive or covered in the instructions.



The **Hisense** has a USB port (for service use only), headphones socket and on-screen display transparency control. Its sound quality is poor, its remote control is not easy to use and the model on test has one faulty pixel.



The **Samsung** has good picture quality when showing video, but doesn't handle moving edges well and there's some visual noise apparent in technical tests. It features a headphones socket, a small window that shows the current program while in EPG mode, and its remote can also control certain other Samsung devices. It also has poor sound quality.



The **Celestial** has no good points to mention. But it does have poor sound quality, poor labelling of the controls, one faulty pixel on the TV on test and no S-video input.



The **TEAC** has an in-built DVD player, a USB and flash card port. However, it has poor sound quality and a lack of detail on dark scenes and objects on the picture.



The **Toshiba** has a small window on the screen that shows the current program while in EPG mode, headphones socket and its remote can also control certain other Toshiba devices. Its sound quality is poor, the controls on the unit are at the top and could be hard to reach when the TV is wall-mounted, and it doesn't have sound widening or equivalent surround effect.

The picture quality of all the models on test ranges from poor to only OK, which is why there is no What to Buy list.

Energy consumption when in use (W)	Claimed resolution (pixels)	Dimensions, (cm, H x W x D)*	Contact	Price (\$)
89	1366 x 768	50.5 x 70 x 22.5	www.panasonic.com.au	999
52	1366 x 768	51.5 x 66.5 x 21.5	www.voxson.com	1099
73	1366 x 768	51.5 x 67.5 x 21	www.hisense.com.au	799
113	1366 x 768	49.5 x 67 x 22	www.samsung.com.au	1099
84	1366 x 768	51.5 x 67.5 x 27	www.changhong.com.au	549
87	1366 x 768	51 x 66.5 x 27	www.toshibaav.com.au	879
74	1366 x 768	50 x 66.5 x 23.5	www.teac.com.au	849

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Picture quality: 35%
- Sound quality: 20%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Energy score: 15%
- HD digital tuner score: 10%

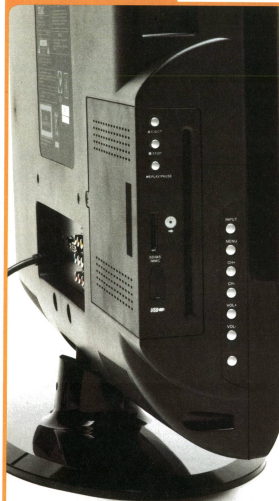
Price Recommended retail, as of April 2009.

TABLE NOTES

* Rounded up to the 0.5cm with the base attached and all protruding parts included, cord and connecting cables excluded.

(A) For service use only.

What to look for



The TEAC and Voxson in this test have a built-in **DVD player**. This could be convenient if space is limited.

If you're likely to lose the remote control, choose a TV with easily accessible **controls on the TV itself**.

TV ESSENTIALS

- A **built-in digital tuner** means you don't have to buy a set-top box to receive digital TV. For most people, standard-definition (SD) or high-definition (HD) doesn't matter, as not much HD TV is being broadcast, but there will be more in future. All the TVs on test have HD screens and HD tuners.
- Look for **easy-to-access sockets** that allow you to get to the connections for DVD players, cable TV and other devices, particularly if you plan to mount the TV on a wall. Some have additional inputs, usually on one side.
- Check that the **input connections** on the TV match the output on the devices you want to hook up to it, such as DVD player/recorder, cable TV or games console, and that there are enough connections for all the devices you want to attach at the same time.
- HDMI** (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) is a digital connection for sound and video in one cable. Even if you don't have any gadgets with HDMI output now, you can expect more devices to use them in future, so it might be worth having at least one HDMI socket on your TV. If you want to use your TV as a computer display, you'll need a DVI input for newer computers or a VGA input for older ones. Or you could use HDMI if your computer has an HDMI output.
- Look for a **remote control** that's easy to read with large, well-spaced buttons and clear labels.
- On-screen menus** should be easy to read and understand without having to resort to the manual.
- All models in this test are **wall-mountable**. However, none comes with wall mounts, so you have to buy a separate kit.

HOW WE TEST

Picture quality Our testers set up all seven models close together and adjust the controls to get the best picture quality possible. They keep the lighting in the room low and the sound muted, and three experts watch a variety of footage (from Blu-ray and DVD movies as well as a computer game) simultaneously on all the screens. They evaluate the picture quality and rate it out of 10 using the following criteria.

- They check how well each TV produces **accurate colour**.
- They look at a number of **test patterns** from a high-quality DVD player to measure if any of the picture is cut off at the edges and they check for distortions, such as circles that aren't round or wavy lines that should be straight.
- Our testers play **movies** and other footage to check the screen's ability to produce images without colour-banding, jerkiness, blurring, vibration and colours bleeding in high contrast or very intensely saturated parts of the image. They also check there are no trails behind fast-moving objects on the screen and that edges are smooth.

Sound quality Our testers listen to movies and music to check for rattles, hums, hisses or distortion. They also make a judgment on how well the high and low sounds are produced.

Ease of use The testers use the remote control, on-board controls and onscreen display to look for logical menus and clear labelling, buttons and controls that are easily identified and can be used without interfering with other controls.

Energy score Our testers use a calibrated power meter to measure the power consumed by the TV when in use and on standby. The latter isn't included in the energy score.

HD digital tuner Our testers check each model's tuner for reception performance in areas with a good-quality signal, as well as areas where reception is less than ideal and where reception might be affected by things such as a dryer or vacuum cleaner operating in the house.



A warm reception

CHOICE tests 11 electric heaters so you can beat the winter chill.

nutshell

► A heater with a fan generally warms a room quicker and distributes air more effectively than one without.
► The best performers are suitable for a small living room or large bedroom.

Compared with an air conditioner or gas heater, an electric heater is not the most efficient or cost-effective way to heat a room. However, if you're renting or don't have a gas outlet, a convection or column heater helps take the chill out of a small living area or bedroom. CHOICE put 11 portable electric heaters to the test, including convection heaters operating at up to 2000W and liquid-filled column heaters, which provide heat through radiant columns and convection, operating at settings up to 2400W.

A heater with a fan is best for warming a small area such as a bedroom or study, while the near-silent operation of a column heater also has its advantages. If you want the best of both worlds, some of the heaters on test operate with the fan on to reach optimum temperature and then allow you to turn the fan off and let the thermostat keep the room at a stable temperature.

If portability is important, the convection models are significantly lighter than their column counterparts. Thankfully, all the column heaters on test have at least two wheels, making them reasonably easy to move around the house.

Safety first

All heaters passed our earth connection test except the DeLonghi HN20-2. DeLonghi claims this unit is double-insulated, but it contains live components in an uninsulated body. While this meets current Australian safety standards, our testers believe this could be potentially dangerous.

All heaters passed our (very harsh) towel test with no damage to either the towel or heater, although the Sunair Aquaglo and Sunbeam continued to operate for the duration of the 30-minute test period. >

What to buy \$

DeLonghi DL2401TF	\$169
Sunbeam Smartheat HE6240TF	\$229
DeLonghi Argento HR720	\$149

HOW WE TEST

To assess each heater's performance, our testers perform the following tests in a thermal comfort lab.

Heating speed How long it takes the heater to raise the room temperature by 5°C and 10°C from an ambient temperature of about 8°C with the fan on if it has one.

Heat distribution How evenly it heats the room.

Thermostat How much does the average room temperature fluctuate around a selected temperature? The Kambrook earns a poor rating here as it is the only model without a thermostat.

Ease of use Our testers assess the labelling of and use of controls, each heater's mobility and stability on hard surfaces and carpet, and the ease of cleaning.

Safety Our testers check the heaters' electrical safety, measure surface temperatures, and carry out tilt and towel drape tests. They also check which heaters continue heating when on their sides, as if they'd been knocked over.

Towel test With the heaters running at their highest heat setting, our testers drape a towel over the top, but leave any ventilation channels uncovered. A heater passes the test if it turns itself off or continues to heat without causing damage to itself or the towel. All the models passed this test.

Some of these heaters operate with the fan on to reach maximum temperature and then allow you to turn it off and let the thermostat keep the room at a stable heat.

What to buy

Oil column heaters



66% DeLonghi DL2401TF

PRICE \$169

GOOD POINTS

- Fan.
- Frost-watch function.
- Fold-out castors, no assembly required.

BAD POINTS

- Does not achieve 10°C increase in two hours with the fan off.
- Noisiest model on test with the fan functioning.



65% Sunbeam Smartheat HE6240TF

PRICE \$229

GOOD POINTS

- Humidity cup to prevent the air drying out.
- Fan.
- Frost-watch function.
- Electronic controls.
- Sophisticated thermostat permits setting a temperature.

BAD POINTS

- Widest temperature variation of thermostat operation.
- Highest average deviation from average room temperature after two hours.
- Used most energy during two hours, at 4.36kWh.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES								
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Heating score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Safety tests	Heater type	Frost watch	Timer	Thermal cut-out	Thermostat	Tilt switch	Heat settings	Heat without fan	Fan-only option
DeLonghi DL2401TF	66	70	58	Pass	Oil column	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 plus fan	✓	
Sunbeam Smartheat HE6240TF	65	62	71	Pass	Oil column	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3 plus fan	✓	
DeLonghi Argento HR720	63	64	60	Pass	Convection			✓	✓		2	nf	nf
DeLonghi HN20-2	63	63	63	Fail (A)	Convection	✓		✓	✓		1	nf	nf
Sunair CHS2FT	62	63	60	Pass	Convection	✓	✓	✓	✓		3 plus fan	✓	✓
Omega OCH20FTA	61	59	66	Pass	Convection	✓	✓	✓	✓		3 plus fan	✓	✓
DeLonghi Rapido RAP2401T	60	59	61	Pass	Oil column	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	nf	nf
Omega Altise OC2411	58	59	56	Pass	Oil column		✓	✓	✓		3 plus fan	✓	
Kambrook Slimline Silent KPH200	55	54	58	Pass	Convection			✓		✓	3	nf	nf
Sunair Aquaglo NHS11T	54	56	50	Pass	Water column		✓	✓	✓	✓	3	nf	nf
Sunair OIL11TS	53	52	55	Pass	Oil column	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	nf	nf

Convection heater



63% DeLonghi Argento HR720

PRICE \$149

GOOD POINTS

- Easy access to thermostat control.

BAD POINTS

- No fan.
- No timer.
- No cord storage.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dimensions (cm, L x H x D)	Weight (kg)	Cord length (m)	Cord storage	Contact	Price (\$)
33 x 64 x 15	16.1	2.2	✓	www.delonghi.com.au	169
31 x 63 x 16	18.2	1.7	✓	www.sunbeam.com.au	229
27 x 46 x 21	4.6	2.2		www.delonghi.com.au	149
31 x 42 x 10	3.1	1.5		www.delonghi.com.au	69
38 x 43 x 11	3.4	1.7		www.gafcontrol.com.au	60
27 x 40 x 16	3.6	1.8		www.omegaltise.com.au	80
26 x 65 x 18	21.2	2.2	✓	www.delonghi.com.au	379
53 x 65 x 16	15.6	1.4	✓	www.omegaltise.com.au	170
75 x 50 x 11	5.5	2.2		www.kambrook.com.au	110
48 x 61 x 15	12.9	1.8		www.gafcontrol.com.au	130
54 x 63 x 15	13.1	1.7	✓	www.gafcontrol.com.au	99

About the rest

- The DeLonghi HN20-2 failed our stringent safety test (see Safety First, page 45).
- The Sunair CHS2FT and Omega OCH20FTA are inexpensive convection heaters with a good range of features and can heat without the fan turned on.
- The DeLonghi Rapido is the most expensive and heaviest heater on test. It has many features but only OK heating performance.
- The Omega Altise OC2411 is a column heater with a fan, but doesn't perform as well as those in our What to Buy list.
- The Kambrook is the only model on test without a thermostat, making it difficult to control temperature levels in a room.
- The Sunair Aquaglo uses a water solution instead of oil and raised the temperature of the air faster than the oil-filled Sunair OIL11TS, but neither perform as well overall as other models on test. The Aquaglo is also the only column heater without four wheels, making it difficult to move around.

What to look for

HEATER FEATURES

- **Thermostat** This maintains an ideal room temperature (within the heater's capacity), and should have a control that's easy to read and set. All models on test except the Kambrook have one. The Sunbeam can set the thermostat to a specific temperature between 5°C and 35°C.
- **A fan** allows for much quicker and more even heat distribution but they can be noisy so it's good to have a heater whose fan can be turned off when the desired temperature is reached.
- **Frost watch** claims to maintain a temperature of about 5°C if the thermostat is left on its lowest setting, avoiding frost. We didn't test this feature but it's useful for colder climates.
- **A thermal cut-out** is designed to prevent the heater from overheating – all models on test have one.
- **A tilt switch** turns the heater off when it falls over.
- Check the **cord length** is long enough for your needs. An electric heater should not be used with an extension cord, as it may get hot and pose a fire hazard.



USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Heating: 70%
- Ease of use: 30%

TABLE NOTES

(A) Failed earth connection test.
n/ No fan.



Guess-free cooking

More microwaves now feature sensor programs, albeit with a higher price tag. CHOICE reveals how well they work.

nutshell

- Ten mid-sized microwave ovens on test, including four sensor models.
- Most of the sensor programs worked well, but sometimes you may have to tweak the cooking time or use manual mode.

In microwaves, sensor programs work by measuring the amount of vapour emitted during cooking to control the cooking time and power level. They should eliminate the need for guesswork – about time, weight or quantity of the food – to achieve your desired results. Similar to auto functions, sensor microwaves have a preset list of foods the sensor program can be used with. Automatic programs are based on pre-programmed times and require you to enter the portion size and select the food type, while manual mode involves entering the power level, time and weight of the food, using the instruction manual or onscreen prompts as a guide. Sensor programs are a good feature to have, however you may need to experiment a little and use the “time-adjust while cooking” function to get the desired result, or use the manual mode.

CHOICE included four sensor models in this test – the LG MS3448GRK, Panasonic Inverter Genius NN-ST667W, Samsung Smart Sensor ME6124ST and the Sharp Carousel R350LW – to see how they fared. Most models performed well in sensor mode and one made it into our What to Buy

list, below. The exceptions were the Sharp, which scored 60% for cooking rice but 80% when retested using the manual mode, and the Panasonic, which scored only 44% using the sensor when reheating a non-stirrable food, but 71% when retested in manual mode.

One disadvantage of sensor cooking is that you can’t tell how long it will take, as no time is displayed until the last minute of the cooking time. Also, if the sensing process is interrupted by opening the door or stopping the microwave, an error code appears and you need to continue in manual mode as using the sensor may cause food to be overcooked. >

What to buy \$

Panasonic Inverter NN-ST657W	BEST BUY	\$239
Samsung MW103H		\$179
LG MS3448GRK		\$249

Most microwaves performed quite well overall, so look closely at cooking scores in the table below to find the model that best matches your cooking habits.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE			COOKING SCORES						FEATURES				
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Cooking score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Broccoli (%)	Rice (%)	Defrost mince (%)	Defrost whole chicken (%)	Reheat non-stirrable food (%)	Reheat typical meal (%)	Auto-cook	Auto-reheat	Sensor cook / reheat	Quick / boosted start	Time-adjust
Panasonic Inverter NN-ST657W (A)	86	93	70	100	80	100	100	76	100	✓	✓			
Samsung MW103H	86	91	73	100	100	100	80	93	70	✓	✓			✓ (E)
LG MS3448GRK	83	88	70	100	80	82	90	77	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sharp Carousel R330JS	80	84	70	100	80	100	80	76	65	✓	✓		✓	✓
Panasonic Inverter Genius NN-ST667W (A)	79 / 82 (B)	86 / 90 (B)	63	100	80	100	90	44 / 71 (B)	100			✓		✓ (E)
Sharp Carousel R350LW	77 / 79 (C)	78 / 81 (C)	74	100	60 / 80 (C)	85	80	73	70	✓		✓	✓	✓ (E)
Sanyo Family Size EMS8597W	74	76	70	100	80	78	60	71	65	✓		✓	✓	✓ (E)
Samsung Smart Sensor ME6124ST	72	82	48	100	100	76	80	72	65	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Whirlpool X2-30ES/S	72	74	67	80	80	100	70	49	65		✓		✓	
Sanyo Mid Size EMS6786V	66	73	50	100	80	100	60	27	70	✓	✓		✓	

What to look for

ESSENTIAL MICROWAVE FEATURES

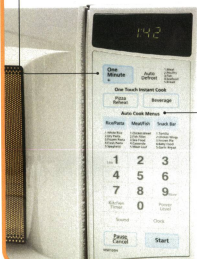
- **Controls** Look for easy-to-use controls and good instructions on the display.
- **Visibility** A bright interior light and large, clear viewing window enable you to check your food as it's cooking.
- **Cleaning** Look out for holes and gaps inside the microwave that can trap food and grease.
- **Size** Make sure it can fit your microwave-safe cooking dishes – take those you're likely to use to the shop with you. Also, you need about 10cm of space around the outside of the oven for ventilation, plus 20cm above it.

→ **Quick/boost start** is a handy way of starting the oven, usually by pressing a single button. With most models, the cooking time increases in one- or half-minute steps if you press the button again. It's particularly handy for reheating.

FEATURES WORTH HAVING

The table below lists which models have some of the following features.

- **Automatic functions** for defrosting, cooking and reheating are convenient. Automatic defrost usually asks you to enter the weight and type of food, and the oven calculates the time – all models in this test have this feature.
- **Sensor cooking** Look for a good selection of auto or sensor programs for foods that you often cook or reheat.
- **Time-adjust during cooking** allows you to increase or decrease the time programmed during cooking.
- **Multistage programming** Models with this feature can be programmed to perform a sequence of functions, such as defrost, cook then leave to stand. All except the LG have this function.
- **A child safety lock** allows you to push a sequence of buttons to deactivate the microwave. All models have this feature.
- **Kitchen timer** A stand-alone kitchen timer can be used to time other things, such as boiling an egg.



SPECIFICATIONS

	Delayed start or preset cooking	Kitchen timer	Program memory	Pre-programmed memory	Multistage cooking	Claimed volume (L)	Wattage (W)	Claimed external dimensions (cm. W x H x D)	Usable cavity dimensions (cm. W x H x D)*	Turntable diameter (cm)*	Contact	Price (\$)
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	32	1100	52 x 30 x 40	38 x 23 x 37	35	www.panasonic.com.au	239
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	28	1000	52 x 30 x 38	35 x 23 x 35	32	www.samsung.com.au	179
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	34	1100	56 x 32 x 44	37 x 25 x 38	36	www.lge.com.au	249
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(F)	1100	52 x 31 x 45	37 x 22 x 38	32	www.sharp.net.au	230
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	32	1100	52 x 30 x 40	38 x 23 x 37	35	www.panasonic.com.au	299
0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(F)	1100	52 x 31 x 45	37 x 23 x 37	32	www.sharp.net.au	241
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	34	1000	54 x 30 x 45	38 x 22 x 41	32	www.sanyo.com.au	229
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	34	1000	52 x 30 x 42	37 x 22 x 38	32	www.samsung.com.au	299
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	30	900	54 x 30 x 45	35 x 22 x 36	31	www.whirlpool.com.au	259
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	28	900	52 x 34 x 41	34 x 22 x 36	32	www.sanyo.com.au	199

HOW WE TEST

Cooking Using a sensor program where one is available, or the auto program or manual mode if not, our tester defrosts mince meat and a whole chicken. In both cases it's easy for parts of the food to start cooking if the auto-defrost time is too long or the oven's microwave distribution is not even. She cooks broccoli to assess whether the oven overcooks vegetables. She also cooks rice, which requires a uniform temperature and specific power level. Finally, she reheats a non-stirrabable, high-fat meal and measures whether it is heated evenly throughout and to a high enough temperature.

Ease of use Our tester checks that controls are intuitive, easy to operate and the instructions easy to follow, as well as the light's effectiveness and if there's a large viewing window that's easy to see through. She checks the interior and exterior are easy to clean.

choice shopper

To get the best deal on a microwave, call CHOICE Shopper, 1300 360 655, with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Cooking score: 70%
- Ease of use score: 30%

Features See What to Look For, above.

Wattage Mid-sized microwaves have a range of 900W-1100W. The higher the wattage, the faster the food will cook.

Price Recommended retail, as of March 2009.

TABLE NOTES

* Measured to the nearest cm.

(A) Minor cosmetic change in July 2009.

(B) Calculated using sensor function score / manual setting score for reheating quiche.

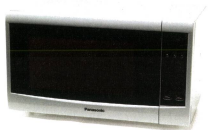
(C) Calculated using sensor function score / manual setting score for cooking rice.

(D) On auto function only.

(E) On sensor function only.

(F) Sharp doesn't specify capacity in litres; it's classed as "mid-sized".

What to buy



86% Panasonic Inverter NN-ST657W

PRICE \$239

CLAIMED VOLUME 32L

GOOD POINTS

- Best overall performer, with an excellent cooking performance score.
- Excellent results for broccoli, defrosting mince and chicken, and reheating a meal.
- Good for ease of use.
- Equal best for ease of cleaning.

BAD POINTS

- Difficult to see the food through the door during use.



86% Samsung MW103H

PRICE \$179

CLAIMED VOLUME 28L

GOOD POINTS

- Very good overall score and excellent for cooking performance.
- Excellent results for cooking broccoli, rice, defrosting mince and reheating quiche.
- Good for ease of use.
- Has very good through the door visibility when in use.
- Cheapest model on test.
- Has audible prompts that can be turned on or off.

BAD POINTS

- The cavity has many small holes that can accumulate dirt, making cleaning difficult.



83% LG MS3448GRK

PRICE \$249

CLAIMED VOLUME 34L

GOOD POINTS

- Very good overall and for cooking performance.
- Excellent results for cooking broccoli, defrosting chicken and reheating a meal.
- Good for ease of use.
- The digital display gives step-by-step word prompts.
- Has a sensor cook and reheat function that works well.
- Has the largest turntable diameter and a round internal cavity which maximises the usable space.
- Comes with a steamer.

BAD POINTS

- The cavity has many small holes that can accumulate dirt, making cleaning difficult.
- Has no multistage programming option.

About the rest

- The Sharp Carousel R330JS is very good for overall cooking performance, and is easy to use with well-grouped controls and a clear digital display. However, it scored only 65% for reheating a meal and has lots of holes in the interior where dirt can accumulate.
- The Panasonic Inverter Genius NN-ST667W and Sharp Carousel R350LW have sensor cooking and reheating, but the Panasonic sensor doesn't work very well for reheating non-stirrable food, while the Sharp does not cook rice well using the sensor. We retested using manual mode and the scores improved markedly (see the table, page 48). Furthermore, the Panasonic is the equal most expensive in this test, scored only 63% for ease of use, and is just OK for through the door visibility. At 74%, the Sharp has the highest ease of use score, thanks to its large digital display with step-by-step word prompts, intuitive controls and labelling, and good through-the-door visibility.
- The Sanyo Family Size EMS8597W performs well in most tests but is let down by its defrosting chicken and reheating a typical meal scores – only 60% and 65% respectively. Its controls and labels are intuitively grouped with good contrast but the digital words are a little small.
- The Samsung Smart Sensor ME6124ST performs well for most cooking tests, except reheating a typical meal (65%). It has an excellent score for cooking vegetables using the sensor program, however, it is expensive, is borderline (48%) for ease of use due to very small labelling, has very poor through-the-door visibility, and holes in the cavity where dirt and grease can accumulate.
- The Whirlpool X2-30ES/S has a good overall score and is excellent for defrosting mince. But it scored only 49% for reheating a non-stirrable food, is only OK for through-the-door visibility and is one of the smallest on test with one of the larger price tags.
- The Sanyo Mid Size EMS6786V scored only 66% overall, but has excellent scores for cooking broccoli and defrosting mince. It is let down by a poor result for reheating a non-stirrable food, 60% for defrosting chicken and only 50% for ease of use. Visibility through the door is poor, there are many small holes internally that can accumulate dirt and most of the controls are behind the door so programs and times must be set with the door open.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

- If you have hand weakness or dexterity problems, both Panasonics, both Sharps and the Samsung MW103H are suitable, as their door latches are large and easy to open with the palm of the hand.
- The latter three models and the LG are also suitable for someone with vision or cognitive impairment, as visibility through their door during cooking is good and the digital displays are large and clear. Their control panels have good colour contrast, are grouped intuitively and are easy to understand. The Sharp R350LW and LG also have step-by-step word prompting instructions.

Sounds from the dock side

Speaker docks offer portable convenience but at a cost to sound quality.

nutshell

- ▶ Price is not a good indicator of sound quality for these speaker docks.
- ▶ Volume is important if you want to listen outdoors.
- ▶ In general, the smaller the dock, the less bass response.

As the name suggests, personal music players are designed for one person. However, since music is something we like to share occasionally, a relatively low-cost speaker dock may come in handy. CHOICE tested 15 speaker docks priced from \$100 to \$230. Most comprise a couple of speakers, an iPod dock, basic controls and a display. Our recommended models have no display, relying instead on the music player to tell you which track is playing. Price is not a good indicator of sound quality, with the worst-performing dock on test costing \$189 and the best costing \$149.

How they sound

As well as our indoor testing, for this test we took the docks outside to see if they could provide music for a small party or barbecue. Most aren't suitable because they either can't provide enough sound, or the sound is distorted when the dock is turned up to maximum volume. Our outdoor listeners, all CHOICE staff, like the GHT best, and the Jensen and TEAC SRLXiB are also considered good with the volume slightly turned down.

In our studio setting, the expert panellists were more critical of sound quality. They were impressed with the GHT for its rich bass and sense of space, but noticed some vibration at very low frequencies, which would only be a problem for music with very deep bass notes. The Altec Lansing cannot match the GHT for bass, but the panel liked its clarity, believing it sounded "natural" and had a sense of space. The Jensen was also described as clear and balanced, but sounded mono and lacked the natural feel of the Altec Lansing.

Most of the rest are only OK for sound. The AVLabs, Logitech Pure-Fi Express Plus and TEAC SRLXiB are the best of them, but all have trouble with bass and tend to lose clarity when the music is complex.

The Memorex iWake and Sony don't have much volume to begin with and distort if turned up to near-maximum. Although the panellists weren't impressed, they felt these products could serve as a clock radio with the added docking function, but only if sound quality isn't a priority. >

What to buy



72% Altec Lansing inMotion iM310

PRICE \$149

GOOD POINTS

- An OK choice for use outdoors.
- Good on-board controls.
- Will work with batteries.

BAD POINTS

- No remote control.
- No display.



70% GHT 2.1 Home Entertainment System

PRICE \$149

GOOD POINTS

- A very good choice for use outdoors.
- Good on-board controls.

BAD POINTS

- User manual contains no manufacturer contact details.
- No display.
- Relatively heavy and bulky.
- Doesn't work with batteries.

The first line of defence

Some pool fences have been withdrawn after failing our safety tests.

nutshell

► Five out of 16 fences failed our strength and rigidity test – a clear improvement over our 2004 test result, but still far too many. ► Manufacturers should share the responsibility with consumers for installing compliant fencing; the Australian standard for pool fences should be mandatory, and all states should introduce regular inspections to ensure compliance.

One tragic week in late 2008, three boys, each about two years old, drowned in domestic swimming pools in NSW. Children aged between one and two are at peak risk for so-called “pool immersion injury or death”. In 2007-08, 16 children aged four years or younger drowned in swimming pools across Australia.

Pool fencing is an important part of preventing such tragedies. A recent Queensland study shows the great majority of toddler drowning deaths in domestic pools between 1992 and 2001 occurred in pools that did not comply with fencing requirements. These included pools with no fencing, inadequate fences, or gates that were tied or propped open.

CHOICE tested 16 pool fences, purchased in Sydney and Wollongong, against key sections of the Australian Standard AS 1926.1-2007. We didn't test gates, as their key safety aspects (such as their ability to self-close) depend very much on correct installation.

HOW WE TEST

We test the fence panels against the Australian Standard for pool fencing, AS 1926.1-2007.

Dimensions Our tester measures the fence's overall height, the height of the non-climbable zone (between the lower and upper horizontal rails) and the gaps between vertical bars. All the fences passed this test.

Finish He checks for any sharp edges, projections or finger traps. Some fences had minor failures.

Strength and rigidity of openings The fence panel is mounted vertically and a cone-shaped probe is forced through the bars at three different locations. It must take at least 150 Newtons of force (approximately 15kg) to get through. See the table, page 57, for which fences passed this test.

Strength of fencing components The fence is mounted horizontally and subjected to different forces of up to 330N (approximately 34kg). Components such as rails and bars must not permanently deform, break or come loose. All the fences passed this test.

Pool fences fail CHOICE safety tests

All the fences on test passed dimensional aspects required by the Australian Standard (see Current Pool Fence Legislation, page 56). This means they are high enough, the gaps between their vertical bars aren't too wide and they have no climbing footholds. They also passed the “strength of components” test, so their bars and welds are strong enough to withstand reasonably strong forces, such as from a heavy bump. In our last report (CHOICE, September 2004) one fence failed this test; that company appears to be no longer trading.

However, five of the 16 fences tested failed the “strength and rigidity of openings” test, which checks whether the vertical bars are rigid enough to stop an opening being forced to a size that would allow a young child to gain entry. This is a better result than in 2004, when 18 of the 31 fences failed, but is still not good enough. Any fence that fails this test could pose a safety hazard.

Some manufacturers whose products failed our test queried the results, saying their fences are tested and certified as meeting the Australian Standard. There are subtle but potentially significant differences between the 2007 version of the standard, to which we tested, and the 1993 version that many manufacturers still use and is often referenced in pool fence regulations; this could account for why we found different results for some fences.

Following manufacturer responses, we obtained and tested more samples of the ARC Fences Eden flat-top and Bunnings flat- and loop-top fences against the “strength and rigidity of openings” test. The ARC fence passed this second round, as did some of the Bunnings panels, but one each of the Bunnings flat-top and loop-top fences again failed the test.

Small manufacturing variations could also account for why their products failed our test. For example, the distance between the vertical bars might be a few millimetres larger than intended, or a section of metal tubing might be slightly thinner (and therefore weaker) than usual. A few millimetres can make the difference between passing and failing. Even with products for which a mandatory standard has been in effect for years

(such as cots), we sometimes find samples that fail to meet the standard, despite that model being certified; manufacturing variations, either in materials or processes, usually account for this.

Flat top or loop top?

As with our 2004 test, the majority of fences that failed strength and rigidity – four out of five – were of the flat-top design (see table, page 57). The vertical bars of these fences are fixed and welded inside flat horizontal upper and lower rails. In loop-top fences, sections of tubular pipe are bent through the upper rail so that each section of pipe forms two vertical bars rather than one.

Each style of fence is about the same overall height of 1.2m, but in a loop-top design the upper horizontal rail generally sits a little lower than in a flat-top fence. This means the section of vertical bar between the two horizontal rails is shorter in a loop-top fence, which could help make that section more rigid.

Flat-top fences aren't necessarily inherently weak; three of those on test passed for strength and rigidity. However, our results show once again that a loop-top fence is a safer bet.

Other designs

We tested three other pool fences that are neither flat nor loop top (see table, page 57). The Bunnings Double Top fence has two upper horizontal rails with decorative metalwork incorporated. This results in a similar effect to the loop-top design, with a shorter section of vertical bar than in an equivalent height flat-top fence. This was the only one of the three Bunnings panels to pass our test.

The other two fences are the wire-based ARC Wattle and Willow, both of which also passed. These use 8mm diameter vertical wires or rods instead of tubular rods. Equivalent ARC fences also passed our 2004 test. These

BUNNINGS MENDS ITS FENCES

Following our test, Bunnings conducted further testing and found a wide variation in the strength and rigidity of the uprights in some samples. They have therefore withdrawn some stock from stores. From late April 2009, their supplier, Protector Aluminium, will manufacture the fences to a higher specification, ensuring the fence consistently meets the standard by a comfortable margin.

Bunnings is confident that existing installations of their pool fences don't present a high risk. However, if you have a flat-top pool fence from Bunnings and are concerned about its safety, contact Protector Aluminium on 1300 724 588 for a free on-site test.

fences are more expensive per panel than the flat- and loop-top fences on test, but are well worth considering. Wire-based fencing can be bought in galvanised or powder-coated finishes.

Steel, aluminium or glass?

Some manufacturers and suppliers told us tubular aluminium fencing is becoming increasingly popular over steel. Aluminium is less susceptible to rusting, which can be a concern if you live near the ocean or have a saltwater pool, and steel prices have recently risen, although we found fence prices were very similar for each material. However, steel pool fences are usually powder-coated (as are aluminium fences) or galvanised, so there should be no significant risk of rusting if they're kept in good condition.

Our latest results indicate tubular steel fencing is stronger and more likely to pass the standard tests than its aluminium equivalent. However, as with the flat-top versus loop-top debate, there's no guarantee; one steel fence failed our test, and three aluminium fences passed. Quality of construction and design count much more than the material used.

Safety glass is another popular material for pool fences. It's made from solid sheets so there are no gaps for a child to squeeze through (provided the panels are correctly installed). Glass fencing is also less obtrusive >

Regular inspection should be conducted in all states to ensure pool fences aren't just safe when installed, but remain safe for the rest of their existence.

What to look for

POOL FENCE ESSENTIALS

- **Design and material** No one design or material is necessarily safer than another. However, our results indicate loop-top or similar style fences might be worth considering over flat-top designs – see Flat Top or Loop Top? and Steel, Aluminium or Glass?, above.
- **Installation** Check that the installer is familiar with local pool fence regulations. If you're installing it yourself, contact your local council and state government to get a copy of all applicable laws. Guides for pool fence installation are available. When the fence is complete, get the local council or authority to inspect it and give you a certificate of compliance.

Standard certification The fence should be certified as meeting Australian Standard AS 1926.1; look for labels such as the red and white "Five Ticks" StandardsMark (right), or ask the supplier for a statement of compliance. Our testing suggests this isn't always a guarantee that individual fence panels will pass the standard tests, but is still worth looking for.



The quality of your pool fence's construction and design counts for much more than the material used.

< than most steel or aluminium fences. However, safety glass panels are almost three times more expensive. We didn't test any glass fencing, as few of the standard tests we use normally apply to it.

Current pool fence legislation

In all Australian states, fences are required for domestic swimming pools, but while regulations have been in place in most states since at least the early 1990s, they aren't enforced as rigorously as they could be. Local councils administer pool fencing regulations in most areas, and usually inspect the fence when it's first constructed. But fences can fall into disrepair over time, and so far only WA requires ongoing inspections every four years to ensure the fence still meets requirements. Queensland is currently considering a similar regime.

Although no fence can replace the need to supervise young children at all times in and around the pool (see Pool Safety, opposite), adequate pool fencing is an integral part of pool safety.

Correct installation and use are essential, but it's also vital that the fence be correctly designed and sturdily built so that youngsters can't climb it or squeeze through the bars.

Time for a mandatory standard

There are three stages at which the safety of a pool fence or its components should be assessed: at the time of manufacture; at installation; and thirdly, at regular intervals after installation. Most jurisdictions require pool owners (particularly of newly constructed pools) to install fences that meet the Australian Standard. However, there's no mandatory safety standard applied to pool fences at the time of retail – in other words, the onus is on the consumer to install a standard-compliant fence, but not on the manufacturer or retailer to supply one. CHOICE believes that just as pool fencing itself is mandatory, the Australian Standard for pool fencing should also be mandatory, so consumers can be confident any fence they buy will comply with safety regulations and can be recalled if found to be faulty. Responsible fence manufacturers already routinely test their fences to the standard, so this would not be a burden to most companies.

We also believe pool fence installers should be licensed to ensure they know the relevant regulations. And last, but far from least, regular inspection, as is done in WA, should be implemented in all states to ensure pool fences aren't just safe when installed, but remain safe for the rest of their existence. ■

Pool fence designs

Flat top



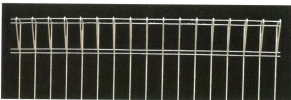
Loop top



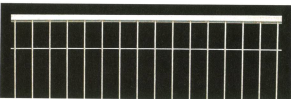
Other designs



Bunnings Double Top



ARC Fences Wattle



ARC Fences Willow

POOL SAFETY

Supervise toddlers and children at all times when they're in or around a pool. Supervision should always be by a competent adult, not an older child. Stay alert; lack of supervision is a key factor in many toddler drownings.

Keep your pool fence and gate in good repair and make sure the gate latches automatically when shut. A significant number of drownings occur in pools that have no fence, or an inadequate or poorly maintained one.

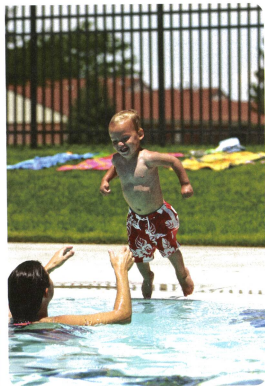
Don't prop or tie the gate open, even for a short time.

Don't leave any objects near the fence that a child could use as a climbing aid.

Three-sided pool fencing (with direct access from the house to the pool area) is permitted for many older pools, but four-sided fencing is safer, as it completely separates the pool area from the house. At the least, make sure any doors or windows opening onto the pool area are secure and lockable, and preferably self-closing.

At least one household member should know how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in case of accidents. Display a guide to CPR near the pool (this is mandatory in many areas).

Familiarise your children with water and teach them to swim as early as possible, but bear in mind this isn't a substitute for supervision and good fencing; youngsters who can swim may still get into difficulties and drown.



BUYER BEWARE

When we bought the pool fences, one manufacturer inadvertently supplied us with garden fencing instead, despite us clearly asking for pool fencing. Their garden fencing looks identical to their pool fencing but is made from a slightly thinner and weaker grade of aluminium. Unsurprisingly, some of the garden fence panels failed our test and it was only when discussing this with the manufacturer that the mistake was discovered. We then obtained the correct fence and it passed our test. When ordering your fence, specify clearly you want pool fencing and check your invoice or receipt states clearly that the product is pool fencing.

Although important, teaching children to swim is no substitute for good pool fencing and supervision.

POOL FENCES

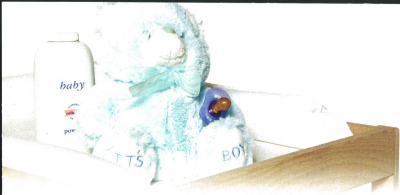
Brand / model (in alphabetical order within each group)	Material	'Strength and rigidity of openings' test	Contact	Price (\$)
FLAT TOP				
Amazing Fencing	Aluminium	Fail	02 9831 8211	95
ARC Fences Eden	Aluminium	Fail	www.arcfences.com.au	115
Boresi	Aluminium	Pass	www.boresi.com.au	99
Bunnings	Aluminium	Fail	www.bunnings.com.au	99
Dunn & Farrugia	Steel	Pass	www.dunnandfarrugia.com.au	99
Fencing and Gate	Steel	Pass	www.fencingandgate.com.au	100
Kelui Tooling	Steel	Fail	02 9632 7000	92
Our Town Fencing	Aluminium	Pass	www.ourtownfencing.com.au	99
LOOP TOP				
Bunnings	Aluminium	Fail	www.bunnings.com.au	99
Dunn & Farrugia	Steel	Pass	www.dunnandfarrugia.com.au	99
Fencing and Gate	Steel	Pass	www.fencingandgate.com.au	100
Kelui Tooling	Steel	Pass	02 9632 7000	92
Our Town Fencing	Aluminium	Pass	www.ourtownfencing.com.au	99
OTHER				
ARC Fences Wattle	Steel wire	Pass	www.arcfences.com.au	160
ARC Fences Willow	Steel wire	Pass	www.arcfences.com.au	171
Bunnings Double Top	Aluminium	Pass	www.bunnings.com.au	160

USING THE TABLE

Material All the fences were made of tubular aluminium or steel, except the ARC Wattle and Willow which are made from 8mm steel wire.

'Strength and rigidity of openings' test "Fail" means at least one panel of that fence failed this test. "Pass" means all the tested panels passed. See Pool Fences Fail CHOICE Safety Tests and How we Test, page 54, for details.

Price The price we paid for each panel in January 2009. Each panel is 2.4m long, except the Amazing Fencing which is 1.9m.



Changing places

CHOICE tested 10 change tables – only four passed all safety tests.

nutshell

- There's no Australian standard for change tables, so we base our test on safety requirements of the Australian Product Safety Framework. ACCC guidelines and overseas standards.
- Four of the 10 change tables on test passed all our safety tests.

As babies need their nappies changed several times a day, a good change table can make the job much easier. A stable, level surface at the right height – plus shelves or drawers for storing nappies, wipes and other odds and ends – saves time, effort and your back.

There are three main types of change table on the market.

Wooden tables with two or three tiers or drawers, such as the Bertini, Boori, Humphrey's Corner, IKEA, Stokke and Swallow models on test.

Portable folding tables with a metal frame and fabric body, such as the Childcare and Valco Baby.

Combination tables include a baby bath under the changing surface – the Infa and Love N Care models on test.

CHOICE assessed 10 change tables for stability, strength of construction and safety, including checking for sharp edges, potential finger and limb traps, and how good they are at preventing a baby rolling or sliding from the changing surface. We also asked a panel of parents to assess the tables for ease of use. ■

What to buy

These models passed all our safety tests. Their side barriers are at least 100mm high, as recommended by the ACCC.

Bertini Renaissance

PRICE \$299

GOOD POINTS

- Two shelves.
- Castor wheels with brakes.

BAD POINTS

- Mattress needs to be purchased separately. The shop recommended a Childcare Universal change table pad.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Solid and well constructed – nice finish."
"Good height."



Boori Three Tier

PRICE \$400

GOOD POINTS

- Two shelves.
- Castor wheels with brakes.

BAD POINTS

- Mattress needs to be purchased separately. The shop recommended a KP-CP change table pad.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Solid construction – simple attractive design."
"The change pad insert looks like it would be hard to clean."



Childcare Deluxe

PRICE \$75

GOOD POINTS

- One shelf and one storage tray.
- No mattress needed as the fabric surface is soft.
- Includes a restraint strap.
- Foldable.

BAD POINTS

- An adult folding the table could catch a finger between the tray frame and its supports on the table frame.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Lightweight and easy to move – useful for travelling or folding for storage between babies."
"Doesn't feel sturdy – fabric might dip or stretch under a heavier baby."



Valco Baby Pax Plus

PRICE \$90

GOOD POINTS

- One shelf and one storage tray.
- No mattress needed as the fabric surface is soft.
- Includes a restraint strap.
- Foldable.

BAD POINTS

- An adult folding the table could catch a finger between the table cross-frames, and between the tray frame and its brackets on the table frame.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Good height."
"Doesn't feel sturdy – fabric might dip or stretch under a heavier baby."



About the rest

- The IKEA and Love N Care are worth considering. These tables have side barriers less than 100mm high, but they passed our safety tests, including the roll-off test, so a baby is not likely to roll off the changing surface. The Love N Care is being revised so the side barriers will be at least 100mm high.
- The Humphrey's Corner, Infa, Stokke and Swallow are not recommended. Each of these has side barriers less than 100mm high (but passed our roll-off test) and also has a potential finger or limb entrapment hazard. The risk of injury from these hazards, although low, is nevertheless unacceptable. The distributors of the Humphrey's Corner, Stokke and Swallow tables dispute our findings.

What to look for

CHOOSING AND USING A CHANGE TABLE

- Change tables need some form of **roll-off protection** such as raised sides. Ideally these should be at least 100mm high, although several models on test have lower sides and still passed.
- Choose one that suits your **height**, so you won't have to bend or reach too far while changing nappies.
- A towel or change mat on the floor or in the middle of a double bed is an

alternative to a change table, although it may not be as comfortable for you.

Safety Ensure collapsible frames are locked securely in place before use.

- Keep everything needed to change your baby close at hand but out of baby's reach.
- Ensure the change table is free from small objects that can cause choking.

A **restraint strap** can help secure your baby, but is no substitute for proper attention. Try to keep one hand on your baby at all times while changing him/her. Never leave your baby unattended on a change table, even just to grab something across the room – take the baby with you. Also, be aware of older siblings climbing on change tables.



The **changing surface** should be easy to wipe down when messes happen (and they will). The mattress or padding should also be easy to wash.

HOW WE TEST

Go to www.choice.com.au/changeables for a full description of how we test for stability, strength of construction, roll-off protection, ease of use and evidence of hazards such as sharp edges and finger and limb traps.

USING THE TABLE

Price Recommended or average retail, as advised by manufacturers in March 2009.

TABLE NOTES

* Including all accessories supplied and excluding any mattress supplied separately; rounded to the nearest 0.1kg.

** Maximum dimensions when in use, rounded up to the next cm.

(A) Passed all our safety requirements and tests but failed a safety recommendation (the sides of the changing surface are not at least 100mm high).

(B) A mattress is available separately.

(C) The changing surface is soft enough to use without a mattress.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE	FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in alphabetical order within groups)	Passed all our safety tests	Material	Mattress	Foldable	Integral two-point harness	Castors / brakes	Weight (kg) *	Dimensions (cm. H x W x D) **	Contact	Price (\$)
RECOMMENDED										
Bertini Renaissance	✓	Wood	(B)			4 / 2	19.3	105 x 61 x 83	www.bertini.com.au	299
Boori Three Tier	✓	Wood	(B)			4 / 4	22.9	100 x 58 x 87	www.boori.com.au	400
Childcare Deluxe	✓	Metal / fabric	(C)	✓	✓		5.0	102 x 67 x 81	www.cnpbrands.com.au	75
Valco Baby Pax Plus	✓	Metal / fabric	(C)	✓	✓		5.4	102 x 54 x 78	www.valco.com.au	90
WORTH CONSIDERING										
IKEA Sniglar	✓ (A)	Wood	(B)				9.8	87 x 54 x 73	www.ikea.com.au	60
Love N Care Deluxe Omega	✓ (A)	Metal / plastic	✓		✓	4 / 4	10.9	103 x 58 x 81	www.lovenecare.com.au	179
NOT RECOMMENDED										
Humphrey's Corner Chest of Drawers		Wood	(B)				33.1	89 x 48 x 86	www.funtastic.com.au	525
Infa Duo Genius		Metal / plastic	✓			4 / 2	15.6	100 x 61 x 90	(02) 4728 8090	199
Stokke Sleepi Care		Wood	✓			4 / 4	22.9	107 x 98 x 76	www.exquira.com.au	1100
Swallow Jessie		Wood	(B)		✓	4 / 4	19.2	99 x 56 x 87	www.babyco.com.au	189



A global treasure trove

Finding your way in the world can cost the Earth with some of these handheld GPS.

nutshell

► Handheld GPS have improved in features and accuracy since CHOICE last tested them in 2007. ► Despite their increased accuracy, don't forget extra batteries, your compass and a map for reliable backup.

A handheld GPS continually monitors its position and speed using a constellation of satellites that orbit the earth. The GPS gives you information on where you've been while you carry it and, if programmed with the correct coordinates, which way you should go.

Given their relative expense, however, will a map and compass serve you just as well? CHOICE found some just don't meet expectations, failing our waterproof tests. They all have the capacity for topographic maps to be loaded onto them via a computer, but this will cost extra. For your own safety, you shouldn't rely exclusively on these devices.

Caching the geography

A growing number of hikers are becoming interested in "geocaching", where a handheld GPS is used to "hunt" points of interest either from other hikers or coordinates found online. All that's required is a PC or Mac connection and relevant software to plug in the coordinates and download them to your GPS – then it's simply a case of preparing for a hike and following

the route to a point of interest. All the handheld GPS models on test can be used for geocaching, although the Garmin eTrex H requires you to punch in the coordinates manually unless you purchase the cable necessary for PC or Mac connectivity. >



TWO-IN-ONE GPS

The Magellan CrossoverGPS can be used as both a car and hiking GPS, supplying maps for both functions, as well as topographical maps for the handheld GPS function. It's a little difficult to hold because of its width, and did not score well in acquisition or battery tests. In our recent car GPS report (CHOICE, May 2009), the CrossoverGPS scored 70% overall.



PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS		
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Acquisition score (%)	Battery life score (%)**	Accuracy score (%)	Waterproofing score (%)	Average battery life (h:mm) *	Software	Connectivity	Number and type of
Garmin Oregon 400c	82	89	73	75	70	100	17:30	WebUpdater 2.4.1 (download)	Mini-B USB/USB 2.0 Type A	2x
Garmin eTrex Vista HCx	78	81	63	85	75	100	26:30	Mapsource 6.15.3, WebUpdater 2.4.1	Mini-B USB/USB 2.0 Type A	2x
Garmin Colorado 300	69	77	63	70	70	50	12:00	Mapsource 6.15.3, WebUpdater 2.4.1	Mini-B USB/USB 2.0 Type A	2x
Garmin eTrex H	68	68	70	75	75	50	18:20	None	Proprietary/RS 232 (A)	2x
Garmin GPSMAP 60	68	78	33	80	70	100	22:00	Mapsource 6.15.3, WebUpdater 2.4.1	Mini-B USB/USB 2.0 Type A and Proprietary/RS 232 (A)	2x
Magellan Triton 500	51	46	60	70	75	0	15:20	VantagePoint 1.52 (54MB download)	Proprietary/USB 2.0 Type A	2x
Magellan Triton 300	50	46	53	70	75	0	15:20	VantagePoint 1.52 (54MB download)	Proprietary/USB 2.0 Type A	2x
Magellan Triton 400	48	48	50	60	75	0	11:30	VantagePoint 1.52 (54MB download)	Proprietary/USB 2.0 Type A	2x

What to buy

82% Garmin Oregon 400c

PRICE \$750

GOOD POINTS

- Highest score for ease of use.
- Took only 30 seconds to acquire a signal under thick foliage.
- Passed the water immersion test.
- Touch screen controls are very easy to use.
- Large, high resolution, colour screen.
- Has microSD slot.
- Wireless connectivity with other compatible handheld GPS.
- Comes with Australian marine charts.
- Has a barometer and electronic compass.

BAD POINTS

- Touch screen may be operated unintentionally.
- Touch screen may show fingermarks.
- Relatively heavy and bulky unit.
- Most expensive model on test.



78% Garmin eTrex Vista HCx

PRICE \$449

GOOD POINTS

- Longest battery life at 26.5 hours.
- Passed water immersion test.
- Has microSD slot.
- Most compact unit in test.
- Has a barometer and an electronic compass.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing to mention.



'Geo-caching' is where a handheld GPS is used to hunt points of interest either from other hikers or online coordinates.

About the rest

- Our expert testers like the thumbwheel on the Garmin Colorado 300, earning it a good ease of use score, however, like the eTrex H model, it scored only 50% for waterproofing.
- The Garmin GPSMAP 60 has a very good battery life, but its acquisition score is poor under foliage, as it sometimes timed out entirely.
- All the Magellan Triton models have lower overall scores, as they fail the waterproof tests.

BARGAIN TREASURE HUNTING

The Garmin eTrex H is worth considering as a budget GPS backup to your compass and map. PC or Mac connectivity is an optional extra, but at less than half the price of the next least expensive model on test it's a solid basic performer, with good acquisition, battery and accuracy scores.



	Display size (mm, W x H)	Display resolution (pixels, W x H)	Weight (g, with batteries)	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Contact	Price (\$)
Garmin LCD	39 x 64	240 x 400	200	113 x 59 x 35	www.garmin.com.au	750
Garmin LCD	34 x 43	176 x 220	168	106 x 58 x 31	www.garmin.com.au	449
Garmin LCD	39 x 64	240 x 400	213	140 x 61 x 34	www.garmin.com.au	600
Garmin LCD	22 x 53	64 x 128	152	113 x 57 x 30	www.garmin.com.au	150
Garmin LCD	34 x 52	160 x 240	205	159 x 58 x 42	www.garmin.com.au	350
Magellan LCD	33 x 45	240 x 320	189	118 x 56 x 31	www.magellan.com.au	650
Magellan LCD	33 x 45	240 x 320	181	118 x 56 x 31	www.magellan.com.au	400
Magellan LCD	33 x 45	240 x 320	183	118 x 56 x 31	www.magellan.com.au	600

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Ease of use: 40%
- Acquisition: 25%
- Battery life: 15%
- Accuracy: 10%
- Waterproofing: 10%

Price Recommended retail, as of April 2009.

TABLE NOTES

* When tracking satellites only.
(A) With optional accessories.

What to look for

HANDHELD GPS FEATURES

- The **screen** should be clear and bright enough to see everything you need. Lettering of essential information, such as the numbers in coordinates, should be large enough to read properly.
- **Size and weight** make a difference – the larger the unit, the more difficult it will be to hold. By contrast, the buttons need to be large enough to press easily.
- **PC or Mac software** is useful for setting up maps before heading out for a hike or downloading your trip afterwards. All but the Garmin eTrex H come with the necessary cable.
- All the devices except the Magellan CrossoverGPS use **AA batteries**. This means you can use rechargeable batteries and have extras on hand in case of an emergency.
- **Topographical maps** These are useful for seeing contour lines, however, none of the models on test come with these maps as standard. Check the maps available for the models on test at the contact websites; you may be able to buy them more cheaply from third-party vendors. We found prices starting from \$299.



HOW WE TEST

Ease of use testing is conducted in two stages.

Members of the Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad examine each unit, plot a simple route and follow the track log to gauge its accuracy. This is followed by an assessment conducted by CHOICE, which includes starting the unit, logging a waypoint or route, button accessibility and screen readability.

Acquisition Our testers measure how long each unit takes to acquire a satellite fix under a clear sky and then under dense foliage. Three runs of each test are carried out on different days and at different times to provide a variety of satellite constellations.

Battery life Each unit is set up to constantly fix its position, then checked every hour until its batteries run out or the unit shuts down with a low battery indication.

Accuracy is assessed by testing the devices at four survey points and a variety of altitudes. The test is repeated twice at different times of day, when a different constellation of satellites would be within range.

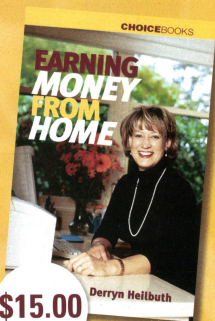
Waterproofing Models that claim to be waterproof to the IPX7 Standard are submerged to a depth of one metre for 30 minutes. The Magellan CrossoverGPS, which claims waterproofing to IPX4 Standard, is sprayed with water at all angles for five minutes. The units are then dried and turned on to obtain a fix.

CHOICE Books

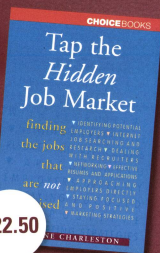
EARNING MONEY FROM HOME

PACKED with ideas and advice for any home business.

- **RESEARCH** opportunities and competition
- **HOW** to fund your venture
- **DEAL** with accounting and tax
- **ESTABLISH** good relationships with your customers



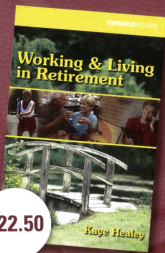
\$15.00



\$22.50

Tap the Hidden Job Market

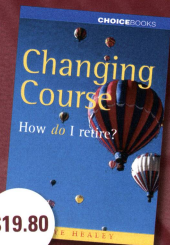
Get on track to finding your first job, a new position or work in an entirely new field.



\$22.50

Working & Living in Retirement

How to make the most of your retirement.



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Learn how to retire before you retire.

HOW TO ORDER



Call 1800 069 552, 9am–5pm,
Mon–Fri, AEST, and quote CB



www.choice.com.au/books



Postage and handling: \$6 for 1–2
books, free for 3 or more

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on 02 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD ■ McCain Food has recalled **McCain Shepherd's Pie**, 400g, cardboard outer box with a plastic inner tray, best before June 2010, and with the numbers 353 appearing after the time code. It was available in Coles and Bi-Lo in NSW and ACT and Coles Online.

The problem It contains an undeclared allergen in fish.

What to do Don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to fish. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

FOOD ■ Heinz Australia has recalled **Heinz Dijon Mustard Sauce with a Hint of Orange**, 370ml plastic bottle, best before 19/11/10.

The problem It contains undeclared allergens, namely egg and milk.

What to do Don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to egg or milk. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

DUMMY ■ Learning Curve Australia has recalled **The First Years Classic Pooch Pacifier and Pacifier Attachment**, model number Y9084, sold at Target, Tiny Tots Toys, Toyland Queensland, Toyworld Mareeba, Daily Deals and Baby On A Budget between July 2008 and February 2009.

The problem It fails the mandatory Australian Safety Standard relating to the packaging of the product.

What to do Return it to RC2 Australia Pty Ltd, t/as Learning Curve Australia, Reply Paid 140, Mt Waverley, Vic, 3149 to receive a refund.

MOTOR VEHICLE ■ Ford Motor Company has recalled **SX and SY Territory**, built between 1 February 2004 and 31 December 2008 (excluding turbo models).

The problem Under certain operating conditions the front brake hoses may develop a brake fluid leak.

What to do Known owners will be contacted by mail, or for more information call 1800 503 672.

MOTOR VEHICLE ■ Mitsubishi has recalled **Mitsubishi Lancer and Outlander vehicles**, with the following VIN numbers: Lancer – between JMFLMCA48A9U000201 and JMFLMCA48A9U000449; JMFLTCA48A9U000201 and JMFLTCA48A9U001795; JMFLTCA48A9U000201 and JMFLTCA48A9U000833; JMFSMCA48A9U000217 and JMFSMCA48A9U000463; JMFSMCA48A9U000403 and JMFSMCA48A9U0013406; JMFSMCA48A9U000227 and JMFSMCA48A9U002956; JMFSMCA48A9U000216 and JMFSMCA48A9U001075. Outlander – between JMFXTCV5W8Z000824 and JMFXTCV5W8Z006295 and between JMFXTCV5W9Z000101 and JMFXTCV5W9Z002218.

The problem If the car is only driven at low speed with minimal or no throttle opening, an increased brake pedal effort may be required on the first braking application because of the possibility of the brake booster check valve sticking.

What to do Owners will be contacted by mail, or contact your nearest Mitsubishi dealer.

PRAM-STROLLER ■ Nursery Elegance has recalled **Peg Perego Skate Pram/Stroller**, model PSK300034, sold since 1 February 2008.

The problem The bassinet and seat assembly has steel pins on each side which have been reported to have fallen out while in use. This would mean the bassinet/seat assembly isn't locked in place, and may cause a child to fall out. The affected pins don't have screwdriver slots in the end.

What to do Check to see if the pins are still in place. If either or both are missing, stop using the pram. A free repair kit will be sent to you, or a free repair can be arranged, even if both pins are still in place – call 1300 330 356, 9am to 5pm EST, making note of the catalogue number on the underside of the frame before calling.

BLENDER ■ Rose and Lily has recalled **Babymoove Bebedelice Blender Seal**, product code 232499, batch 2908-JAK216/41733/AUSTA, sold in Australia in December 2008 and January 2009. It was also sold through online retailers.

The problem The blender has a bowl/container with an orange plastic lid with blade. A rubber seal in the rim of the lid could break, causing the blender to leak, and possibly the seal to be chopped up and mix into the food.

What to do Call 1300 119 837 to arrange for an improved replacement lid.

Product Alert

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has warned consumers to stop using a range of Hydroxycont weight-loss products bought from the US and to exercise caution when using Australian Hydroxycont products. According to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), they may be implicated in health problems including liver failure, cardiovascular disorders and muscle damage that can lead to kidney failure.

Although the manufacturer suggests there may be some difference in the formula of the products approved for sale in Australia, the FDA has not determined which ingredients or dosages may be associated with the risk. Go to www.tga.gov.au/alerts for more information.

FOOD ■ Nut Producers Australia has recalled **Value Pack Dry Roasted and Salted Pistachios**, 500g plastic bag, best before 20/08/09, and sold at Coles in ACT, Queensland, NSW, NT, SA, Tasmania and Victoria.

The problem It may contain salmonella bacteria.

What to do Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

HIGHCHAIR IGC ■ Dorel has recalled the **plastic hinge rivet caps fixed to the Mothers Choice Riviera Hi-Lo Highchair**, model number JGB, sold through Target during January 2008.

The problem Some of the caps fitted to the highchair weren't fully inserted during manufacture, and as a result may fall out and create an ingestion hazard.

What to do Check if the highchair has any loose or missing caps. If so, stop using the highchair immediately. Call 1300 809 526, 9am to 4:30pm EST to arrange for replacement caps to be sent to you.

TOY ■ Roger Armstrong Nursery Furniture has recalled **Evenflo ExerSaucer Triple Fun Stationary Activity Centre**, model number 6231711, UPC number 032884142675, manufactured between October 2006 and December 2008 and imported between December 2006 and November 2008.

The problem When used as an activity table, the cap at one end of the table can loosen and fall off, posing a fall hazard to children leaning or pulling up on the end cap.

What to do To arrange for a repair kit to be sent to you call 1800 062 484 or email Service.ra@bigpond.com.

FAN HEATER GAF ■ Control has recalled **Sunair Fan Heaters**, model numbers FHS34 and FHS35, sold through Bunnings, The Good Guys, Mitre 10, Coles, Priceline, Franklins, Kmart and independent stores between 2005 and 2007.

The problem The heaters have a mechanical fault within the terminal block which could result in a fire.

What to do Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1300 659 489.

STUD SENSOR ■ Stanley Australia has recalled **Stanley Stud Sensor 200 and FatMax Stud Sensor 400**, models 77-720 and 77-730. They were marked on the inside of the battery cover with the year and week of manufacturing, and sold in Australia in March 2008.

The problem A malfunction may mean live electrical wires aren't properly detected behind walls, posing an electric shock hazard to the user.

What to do Don't use it. Follow the instructions outlined in the user manual to contact manufacturer.

COT IGC ■ Dorel has recalled **Mother's Choice Kensington Cot**, model number IC016IG01, sold in Kmart stores between March 2007 and December 2008.

The problem Some of the slats on the drop-side may have weakened, which could cause the vertical slats in the drop-side to separate, creating a safety hazard.

What to do Check if the drop-side has any loose slats. If so, stop using the cot. Call 1300 809 526, 9am to 4:30pm EST, to arrange for a replacement drop-side to be delivered to you.

+ FINANCIAL ADVICE

Party's over for advisers

CHOICE believes the latest corporate collapse must trigger major reforms to the financial advice industry.

The recent collapse of Storm Financial has plunged thousands of households into unexpected debt and extreme desperation, with losses expected to exceed \$100 million. It is unacceptable that individuals who relied

on the "expert" advice of professional financial advisers are now broke and, in some of the worst cases, have lost their homes.

Storm, however, isn't the first major collapse to affect individual investors; in 2006 the Westpoint Group collapse lost investors in excess of \$300 million.

A major parliamentary inquiry is now under way to consider a range of such problems in the financial advice industry. CHOICE is calling on the committee to ban commission-based remuneration and other conflicted remuneration to advisers.

Commission-free and conflict-free advice

There are more than 16,000 financial advisers across the country, and many are doing the right thing. But seeking professional advice shouldn't mean playing Russian roulette with your life savings.

CHOICE has strong views about the changes needed for the financial advice industry. Topping our list of demands is an end to structural conflicts caused by commission, asset-based and other incentive payments. These payment structures bias advice towards product-based investments and strategies that involve gearing. They can also affect the quality of advice. For example, an Australian Securities & Investments Commission investigation in 2006 revealed consumers who received commission-based advice were six times more likely to receive bad advice.

For consumers to have access to reliable, high-quality financial advice, a broad reform agenda is needed. First, commissions and other conflicted remunerations must go. Beyond this, the advice industry must separate itself from

64% of financial planning complaints to the Financial Ombudsman Service related to inappropriate advice.

Source: FOS Annual report, 2007-2008.

11 The approximate number of financial advisers in Australia who meet the legal definition of independent, impartial and unbiased.

Source: FSI Consulting study, 2008.

product issuers and address the structural corruption embedded in the industry. Along the way, educational requirements for advisers must improve, licensing arrangements must become more transparent and consumers must be guaranteed compensation for losses arising as a result of bad advice.

We need your help

Pushing for these sorts of changes means CHOICE will be going head-to-head with major corporate interests. We need you to take action to support our campaign.

Send us your story Have you or a friend or family member been burned by a commission? Has bad advice left you hurting? We want to include as many stories as possible in our submission to the parliamentary inquiry. Email your story to campaigns@choice.com.au.

Sign our online petition We're calling on Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to ban commission-based remuneration in the advice industry. Head to www.choice.com.au/commissionfree.

Write a submission The parliamentary inquiry into financial products and services is currently receiving public submissions. See CHOICE Online, below, for where to go to get information on making a submission.

Join our blog This is our chance to reshape the financial advice industry. What sort of advice industry do we want? Tell us at CHOICE Online, see below. ■



CHOICE ONLINE

Take action to make sure the financial advice you receive won't cost you your home, visit www.choice.com.au/commissionfree



Seeking professional advice shouldn't mean playing Russian roulette with your life savings.

Health information you can trust

choice

Health Reader

Volume 12 No. 4

News

Red meat increases death risk

People who eat high levels of red meat are at a higher risk of death than all sources, including those who eat little or no red meat.

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Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, unbold type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

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The winner of this month's prize goes to H. Alvarado, who's anxiously awaiting Tasmania's return. Thanks also to S. Weinstock, B. Bruer, P. Veness, E. Papier, H. Fitzgerald-Carolan, B. Budarick and D. & I. Zumon for their contributions to this month's Hard Word.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the originals.

Who knew wet hair was so problematic?
Strangely, the medical encyclopaedia doesn't include wet hair as a cause of hydrocephalus (water on the brain).



Using the Magic hair-drying cap, you can dry your hair fast & easy, avoid hair damage caused by electric hair dryer and also prevent moisture from penetrating through the skull.

Wayward isle
Seems Tasmania has drifted over to Eastern Europe. Won't they get a surprise when they wake up in the morning?

Red hot tampons anyone?
We can't see these being a big seller...



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Enjoy a 14 night 'Jewels of Europe' river cruise including a private concert in Vienna, combined with 10 days exploring Eastern Europe. Visit Prague, Berlin, Krakow, and experience an exclusive Chopin piano concert in Warsaw.

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reg \$39.50

your name, address and...

Terms and Conditions: Entrants must be 18 or over. Entry competition is open only to residents of NSW and ACT.

Hi5!

Can you answer the 5 questions below about Jup Jup and Chats?

- How many legs does Jup Jup have?
- What color are Chats' glasses?
- Which segment does Chats belong to?
- What are the colours of Jup Jup?
- What is Chats' full name?

Let's learn about Jup Jup and Chats

A competition for all you Hi-5 fans aged over 18
Vindication for the pundits who reckon Gen Y never grew up?

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